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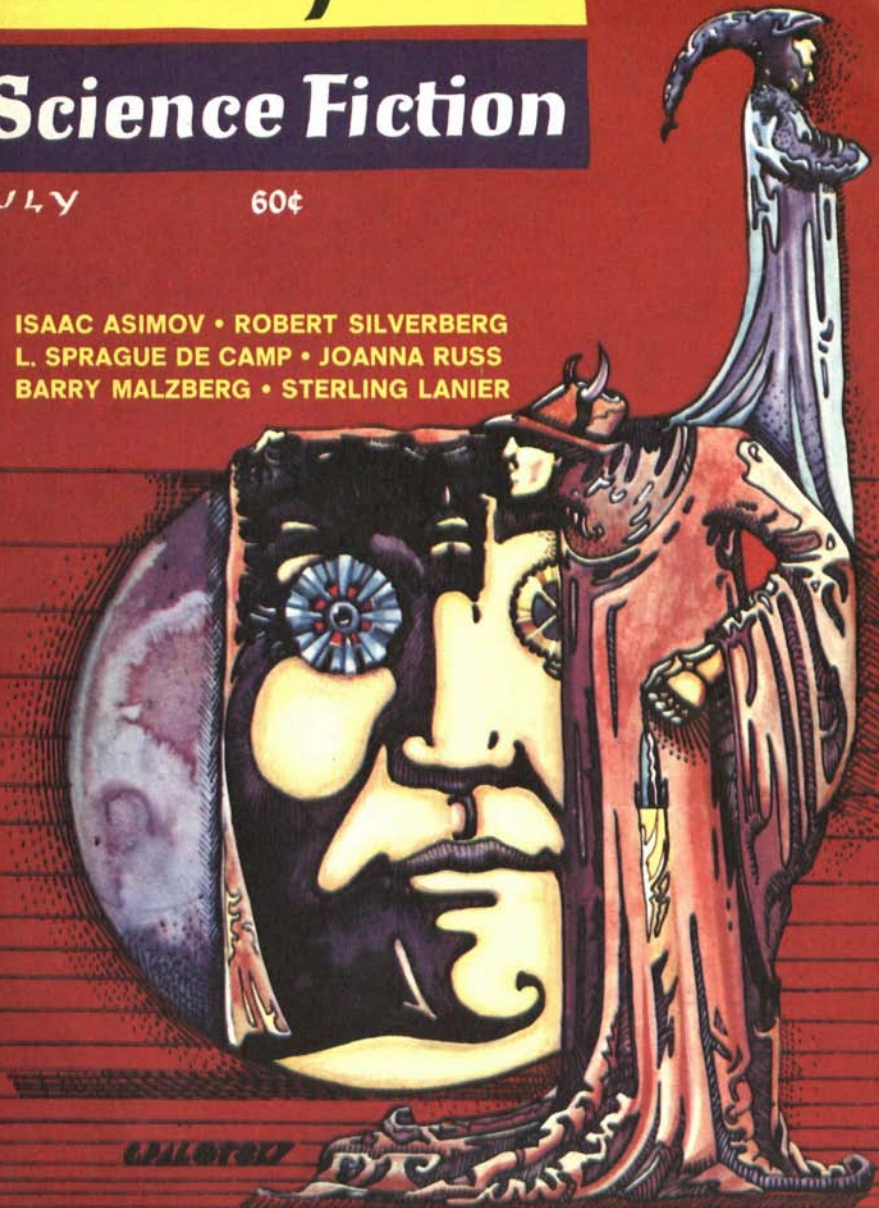

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# Fantasy and Science Fiction

JULY • 21ST YEAR OF PUBLICATION



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*This new Brigadier Ffellowes story takes place during the depression, in the country near Washington D. C. Ffellowes, a military attache at the Washington embassy, is invited to a hunt at an estate that seems somehow mysteriously removed from that time and place, and it is not long before the behavior of the hosts moves from the peculiar to the horrifying.*

# HIS COAT SO GAY

*by Sterling E. Lanier*

THERE HAD BEEN A BIG SPREAD in the newspapers about a British duke going through bankruptcy proceedings and his third divorce simultaneously. The divorce was contested, the evidence was sordid and those giving it equally so. The nobleman in question came out of the whole thing very badly, it being proved, among other things, that he had run up huge debts to tradesmen, knowing damn well when he did it that he couldn't hope to pay them. There was lots more, though, including secret "orgies," which seem to have been dirty parties of the sort to have passed quite unnoticed in Los Angeles.

One of the members tapped his newspaper. A few of us were sitting upstairs in the library after dinner. It was a hot night in New York, but the club was air-conditioned and very pleasant.

"Good thing," said the man with the paper, "that Mason Williams isn't here to shout about this. He'd love to give General Ffellowes a hard time. Can't you hear him? 'Rotten bunch of degenerates! Lousy overbearing crooks and cadgers! Long line of aristocratic bums and swindlers!' It would be the best opportunity he's had in years for trying to annoy the brigadier."

"I notice you were smart enough to say 'trying'!" said someone else. "He's never managed to



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annoy Ffellowes yet. I doubt if this would do it either."

"Who wants to annoy me, eh?" came the easy, clipped tones of our favorite English member. He had come up the narrow back stairs at the other end of the room and was now standing behind my own back. He always moved silently, not I feel certain out of a desire to be stealthy, but from a lifetime's training. Ffellowes' years in (apparently) every secret as well as public branch of Her Majesty's service had given him the ability to walk like a cat, and a quiet one at that.

I jumped and so did a couple of the others, and then there was a moment of embarrassed silence.

Ffellowes is very quick. He saw the newspaper headline in my neighbor's lap and began to chuckle.

"Good heavens, is that supposed to offend me? What a hope! I suppose someone thought our friend Williams might make use of it to savage the British Lion, eh?" He moved from behind my chair and dropped into a vacant seat, his eyes twinkling.

"Item," he said, "the man in question's a Scot, not English. Most important distinction. A lesser and unstable breed." This was said with such dead-pan emphasis that we all started to laugh at once. Ffellowes' smooth, ruddy face remained immobile, but his blue eyes danced.

"If you won't be serious," he said, when the laughter died away, "I shall have to explain why Chattan's little peccadilloes are unlikely to move me to wrath. Or anyone else with any real knowledge, for that matter.

"You know, Richard the Lion Heart was a bad debtor on a scale that makes anyone modern look silly. All the Plantagenets were, for that matter. Richard seems to have been a quite unabashed queer as well, of course, and likewise William the Second, called Rufus. When, at any rate, one asked those lads for monies due, one had better have had a fast horse and a waiting ship. They canceled debts rather abruptly. There are thousands more examples, but I mention the kings as quite a fairish sample. Now Chattan's an ass and his sexual troubles are purely squalid, fit only for headlines in a cheap paper. But there are other cases no paper ever got to print. Not so long ago, one of your splashier magazines ran a purely fictional piece about an aged nobleman, Scots again, who was sentenced never to leave his family castle, as a result of an atrocious crime, not *quite* provable. The story happens to be quite true and the verdict was approved by the Lords in a closed session. The last pope but two had a South Italian cardinal locked up in his own palace for the remainder of his life on various charges

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not susceptible of public utterance. The old man only died ten years ago. So it goes, and there are dozens more cases of a similar nature.

"The fact is, persons in positions of power often abuse that power in the oddest and most unpleasant ways. The extent of caprice in the human mind is infinite. Whenever public gaze, so to speak, is withdrawn, oddities occur, and far worse than illicit sex is involved in these pockets of infection. Once off the highways of humanity, if you care for analogies, one finds the oddest byways. All that's needed is isolation, that and power, economic or physical." He seemed to brood for a moment.

Outside the windows, the haze and smog kept even the blaze of Manhattan at night dim and sultry looking. The garish electricity of New York took on something of the appearance of patches of torch and fire light in the heat and murk.

"Haven't you left out one qualification, sir?" said a younger member. "What about time? Surely, to get these Dracula-castle effects and so on, you have to have centuries to play with a complaisant bunch of peasants, hereditary aristocrats, the whole bit. In other words, a really *old* country, right?"

Ffellowes stared at the opposite wall for a bit before answering. Finally he seemed to shrug, as if he had come to a decision.

"Gilles de Rais," he said, "is perhaps the best example known of your Dracula syndrome, so I admit I must agree with you. In general, however, only in general. The worst case of this sort of thing which ever came to my personal knowledge, and very personal it was, took place in the early 1930's in one of your larger Eastern states. So that while time is certainly needed, as indeed for the formation of any disease, the so-called modern age is not so much of a protection as one might think. And yet there was great age, too."

He raised his hand and the hum of startled comment which had begun to rise died at once.

"I'll tell you the story. But I'll tell it my way. No questions of any sort whatsoever. There are still people alive who could be injured. I shall cheerfully disguise and alter any detail I can which might lead to identification of the family or place concerned. Beyond that, you will simply have to accept my word. If you're interested on that basis . . . ?"

The circle of faces, mine included, was so eager that his iron countenance damned near cracked into a grin, but he held it back and began.

"In the early days of your, and indeed everyone's, Great Depression, I was the most junior mili-

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tary attache of our Washington embassy. It was an agreeable part of my duties to mix socially as much as I could with Americans of my own age. One way of doing this was hunting, fox hunting to be more explicit. I used to go out with the Middleburg Hunt, and while enjoying the exercise, I made a number of friends as well.

"One of them was a man whom I shall call Canler Waldron. That's not even an anagram, but sounds vaguely like his real name. He was supposed to be putting in time as a junior member of your State Department, my own age and very good company.

"It was immediately obvious that he was extremely well off. Most people, of course, had been at least affected a trifle by the Crash, if not a whole lot, but it was plain that whatever Can's financial basis was, it had hardly been shaken. Small comments were revealing, especially his puzzlement when, as often happened, others pleaded lack of funds to explain some inability to take a trip or to purchase something. He was, I may add, the most generous of men financially, and without being what you'd call a 'sucker', he was very easy to leave with the check, so much so one had to guard against it.

"He was pleasant looking, black haired, narrow faced, dark brown eyes, a generalized North European type, and, as I said, about my own age, barely twenty-one. And what a magnificent rider! I'm not bad, or wasn't then, but I've never seen anyone to match Canler Waldron. No fence ever bothered him and he always led the field, riding so easily that he hardly appeared to be conscious of what he was doing. It got so that he became embarrassed by the attention and used to pull his horse in order to stay back and not be first at every death. Of course he was magnificently mounted; he had a whole string of big black hunters, his own private breed he said. But there were others out who had fine 'cattle' too; no, he was simply a superb rider.

"We were chatting one Fall morning after a very dull run, and I asked him why he always wore the black hunting coat of a non-hunt member. I knew he belonged to some hunt or other and didn't understand why he never used their colors.

" 'Highly embarrassing to explain to you, Donald, of all people,' he said, but he was smiling. 'My family were Irish and very patriotic during our Revolution. No pink coats ('pink' being the term for hunting red) for us. Too close to the hated redcoat army in looks, see? So we wear light green, and I frankly get damned tired of being asked what it is. That's all.'

"I was amused for several reasons. 'Of course I understand.

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Some of our own hunts wear other colors, you know. But I thought green coats were for foot hounds, beagles, bassetts and such?'

" 'Ours is much lighter, like grass, with buff lapels,' he said. He seemed a little ill at ease for some reason, as our horses shifted and stamped under the hot Virginia sun. 'It's a family hunt, you see. No non-Waldron can wear the coat. This sounds pretty snobby, so again, I avoid questions by not wearing it except at home. Betty feels the same way and she hates black. Here she comes now. What did you think of the ride, Sis?'

" 'Not very exciting,' she said quietly, looking around so that she should not be convicted of rudeness to our hosts. I haven't mentioned Betty Waldron, have I? Even after all these years, it's still painful.

"She was nineteen years old, very pale, and no sun ever raised so much as a freckle. Her eyes were almost black, her hair midnight, and her voice very gentle and sad. She was quiet, seldom smiled, and when she did my heart turned over. Usually, her thoughts were miles away and she seemed to walk in a dream. She also rode superbly, almost absentmindedly, to look at her."

Ffellowes sighed and arched his hands together in his lap, his gaze fixed on the rug before him.

"I was a poor devil of an artillery subaltern, few prospects save for my pay, but I could dream, as long as I kept my mouth shut. She seemed to like me as much, or even more than the gaudy lads who were always flocking about, and I felt I had a tiny, the smallest grain of hope. I'd never said a thing. I knew already the family must be staggeringly rich, and I had my pride. But also, as I say, my dreams.

" 'Let's ask Donald home and give him some real sport,' I suddenly heard Can say to her.

" 'When?' she asked sharply, looking hard at him.

" 'How about the end of the cubbing season? Last week in October. Get the best of both sports, adult and young. Hounds will be in good condition, and it's our best time of year.' He smiled at me and patted his horse. 'What say, limey? Like some real hunting, eight hours sometimes?'

"I was delighted and surprised, because I'd heard several people fishing rather obviously for invitations to the Waldron place at one time or another and all being politely choked off. I had made up my mind never to place myself where such a rebuff could strike me. There was a goodish number of fortune-hunting Europeans about just then, some of them English, and they made me a trifle ill. But I was surprised and hurt, too, by Betty's reaction.

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"'Not this Fall, Can,' she said, her face even whiter than usual. 'Not—this—Fall!' The words were stressed separately and came out with an intensity I can't convey.

"'As the head of the family, I'm afraid what I say goes,' said Canler in a voice I'd certainly never heard him use before. It was heavy and dominating, even domineering. As I watched, quite baffled, she choked back a sob and urged her horse away from us. In a moment her slender black back and shining topper were lost in the milling sea of the main body of the hunt. I was really hurt badly.

"'Now look here, old boy,' I said. 'I don't know what's going on, but I can't possibly accept your invitation under these circumstances. Betty obviously loathes the idea, and I wouldn't dream of coming against her slightest wish.'

"He urged his horse over until we were only a yard apart. 'You must, Donald. You don't understand. I don't like letting out family secrets, but I'm going to have to in this case. Betty was very roughly treated by a man last year, in the Fall. A guy who seemed to like her and then just walked out, without a word, and disappeared. I know you'll never speak of this to her, and she'd rather die than say anything to you. But I haven't been able to get her interested in things ever since. You're the first man she's liked from that time to this, and you've got to help me pull her out of this depression. Surely you've noticed how vague and dreamy she is? She's living in a world of unreality, trying to shut out unhappiness. I can't get her to see a doctor, and even if I could, it probably wouldn't do any good. What she needs is some decent man being kind to her in the same surroundings she was made unhappy in. Can you see why I need you as a friend so badly?' He was damned earnest and it was impossible not to be touched.

"'Well, that's all very well,' I mumbled, 'but she's still dead set against my coming, you know. I simply can't come in the face of such opposition. You mentioned yourself as head of the family. Do I take it that your parents are dead? Because if so, then Betty is my hostess. It won't do, damn it all.'

"'Now, look,' he said, 'don't turn me down. By tomorrow morning she'll ask you herself, I swear. I promise that if she doesn't, the whole thing's off. Will you come if she asks you and give me a hand at cheering her up? And we are orphans, by the way, just us two.'

"Of course I agreed. I was wild to come. To get leave would be easy. There was nothing much but routine at the embassy any-

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way, and mixing with people like the Waldrons was as much a part of my duties as going to any Fort Leavenworth maneuvers.

"And sure enough, Betty rang me up at my Washington flat the next morning and apologized for her behavior the previous day. She sounded very dim and tired but perfectly all right. I asked her twice if she was sure she wanted my company, and she repeated that she did, still apologizing for the day before. She said she had felt feverish and didn't know why she'd spoken as she had. This was good enough for me, and so it was settled.

"Thus, in the last week in October, I found myself hunting the coverts of—well, call it the valley of Waldrondale. What a glorious, mad time it was! The late Indian summer lingered, and each cold night gave way to a lovely misty dawn. The main Waldron lands lay in the hollow of a spur of the Appalachian range. Apparently some early Waldron, an emigrant from Ireland during the '16, I gathered, had gone straight west into Indian territory and somehow laid claim to a perfectly immense tract of country. What is really odd is that the red men seemed to feel it was all fine, that he should do so.

" 'We always got along with our Indians,' Canler told me once. 'Look around the valley at the faces, my own included. There's some Indian blood in all of us. A branch of the lost Erie nation, before the Iroquois destroyed them, according to the family records.'

"It was quite true that when one looked, the whole valley indeed appeared to have a family resemblance. The women were very pale, and both sexes were black haired and dark eyed, with lean, aquiline features. Many of them, apparently local farmers, rode with the hunt and fine riders they were, too, well mounted and fully familiar with field etiquette.

"Waldrondale was a great, heart-shaped valley, of perhaps eight thousand acres. The Waldrons leased some of it to cousins and farmed some themselves. They owned still more land outside the actual valley, but that was all leased. It was easy to see that in Waldrondale itself they were actually rulers. Although both Betty and Can were called by their first names, every one of the valley dwellers was ready and willing to drop whatever he or she was doing at a moment's notice to oblige either of them in the smallest way. It was not subservience exactly, but instead almost an eagerness, of the sort a monarch might have got in the days when kings were also sacred beings. Canler shrugged when I mentioned how the matter struck me.

" 'We've just been here a long time, that's all. They've simply got used to us telling them what to

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do. When the first Waldron came over from Galway, a lot of retainers seem to have come with him. So it's not really a strictly normal American situation.' He looked lazily at me. 'Hope you don't think we're too effete and baronial here, not that England's becoming so democratized?'

" 'Not at all,' I said quickly and the subject was changed. There had been an unpleasant undertone in his speech, almost jeering, and for some reason he seemed rather irritated.

"What wonderful hunting we had! The actual members of the hunt, those who wore the light green jackets, were only a dozen or so, mostly close relatives of Canler's and Betty's. When we had started the first morning at dawn, I'd surprised them all for I was then a full member of the Duke of Beaufort's pack, and as a joke more than anything else, I had brought the blue and yellow-lapelled hunting coat along. The joke was that I had been planning to show them, the Waldrons, one of our own variant colors all along, ever since I had heard about theirs. They were all amazed at seeing me not only *not* in black, but in 'non-red,' so to speak. The little withered huntsman, a local farmer, named McColl, was absolutely taken aback and for some reason seemed frightened. He made a curious remark, of which I caught only two words, 'Sam Haines,' and then made a sign which I had no trouble at all interpreting. Two fingers at either end of a fist have always been an attempt to ward off the evil eye, or some other malign spiritual influence. I said nothing at the time, but during dinner I asked Betty who 'Sam Haines' was and what had made old McColl so nervous about my blue coat. Betty's reaction was even more peculiar. She muttered something about a local holiday and also that my coat was the 'wrong color for an Englishman,' and then abruptly changed the subject. Puzzled, I looked up, to notice that all conversation seemed to have died at the rest of the big table. There were perhaps twenty guests, all the regular hunt members and some more besides from the outlying parts of the valley. I was struck by the intensity of the very similar faces, male and female, all staring at us, lean, pale and dark eyed, all with that coarse raven hair. For a moment I had a most peculiar feeling that I had blundered into a den of some dangerous creature or other, some pack animal perhaps, like a wolf. Then Canler laughed from the head of the table and conversation started again. The illusion was broken, as a thrown pebble shatters a mirrored pool of water, and I promptly forgot it.

"The golden, wonderful days passed as October drew to a close.

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We were always up before dawn and hunted the great vale of Waldrondale sometimes until noon. Large patches of dense wood had been left deliberately uncleared here and there and made superb coverts. I never had such a good going, not even in Leicestershire at its best. And I was with Betty, who seemed happy, too. But although we drew almost the entire valley at one time or another, there was one exception, and it puzzled me to the point of asking Can about it one morning.

"Directly behind the Big House (it had no other name) the ground rose very sharply in the direction of the high blue hills beyond. But a giant hedge, all tangled and overgrown, barred access to whatever lay up the slope. The higher hills angled down, as it were, as if to enclose the house and grounds, two arms of high, rocky ground almost reaching the level of the house on either side. Yet it was evident that an area of some considerable extent, a smallish plateau in fact, lay directly behind the house, between it and the sheer slopes of the mountain, itself some jagged outlier of the great Appalachian chain. And the huge hedge could only have existed for the purpose of barring access to this particular piece of land.

"'It's a sanctuary,' Canler said when I asked him. 'The family has a burial plot there, and we always go there on—on certain days. It's been there since we settled the area, has some first growth timber among other things, and we like to keep it as it is. But I'll show it to you before you leave if you're really interested.' His voice was incurious and flat, but again I had the feeling, almost a sixth sense, if you like, that I had somehow managed to both annoy and, odder, amuse him. I changed the subject and we spoke of the coming day's sport.

"One more peculiar thing occurred on that day in the late afternoon. Betty and I had got a bit separated from the rest of the hunt, a thing I didn't mind one bit, and we also were some distance out from the narrow mouth of the valley proper, for the fox had run very far indeed. As we rode toward home under the warm sun, I noticed that we were passing a small, white, country church, wooden, you know, and rather shabby. As I looked, the minister, parson, or what have you, appeared on the porch, and seeing us, stood still, staring. We were not more than thirty feet apart for the dusty path, hardly a road at all, ran right next to the church. The minister was a tired-looking soul of about fifty, dressed in an ordinary suit but with a Roman collar, just like the C. of E. curate at home.

"But the man's expression! He

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never looked at me, but he stared at Betty, never moving or speaking, and the venom in his eyes was unmistakable. Hatred and contempt mingled with loathing.

"Our horses had stopped and in the silence they fidgeted and stamped. I looked at Betty and saw a look of pain on her face, but she never spoke or moved either. I decided to break the silence myself.

" 'Good day, padre,' I said breezily. 'Nice little church you have here. A jolly spot, lovely trees and all.' I expect I sounded half-witted.

"He turned his gaze on me and it changed utterly. The hatred vanished and instead I saw the face of a decent, kindly man, yes, and a deeply troubled one. He raised one hand and I thought for a startled moment he actually was going to bless me, don't you know, but he evidently thought better of it. Instead he spoke, plainly addressing me alone.

" 'For the next forty-eight hours this church will remain open. And I will be here.'

"With that, he turned on his heel and re-entered the church, shutting the door firmly behind him.

" 'Peculiar chap, that,' I said to Betty. 'Seems to have a bit of a down on you, too, if his nasty look was any indication. Is he out of his head, or what? Perhaps I ought to speak to Can, eh?'

" 'No,' she said quickly, putting her hand on my arm. 'You mustn't; promise me you won't say anything to him about this, not a word!'

" 'Of course I won't, Betty, but what on earth is wrong with the man? All that mumbo jumbo about his confounded church being open?'

" 'He—well, he doesn't like any of our family, Donald. Perhaps he has reason. Lots of people outside the valley aren't too fond of the Waldrons. And the Depression hasn't helped matters. Can won't cut down on high living and of course hungry people who see us are furious. Don't let's talk any more about it. Mr. Andrews is a very decent man and I don't want Canler to hear about this. He might be angry and do something unpleasant. No more talk now. Come on, the horses are rested, I'll race you to the main road.'

"The horses were *not* rested and we both knew it, but I could never refuse her anything. By the time we rejoined the main body of the hunt, the poor beasts were blown, and we suffered a lot of chaff, mostly directed at me, for not treating our mounts decently.

"The next day was the thirty-first of October. My stay had only two more days to run and I could hardly bear to think of leaving. But I felt glorious too. The previous night, as I had thrown the bedclothes back, preparatory to

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climbing in, a small packet had been revealed. Opening it, I had found a worn, tiny cross on a chain, both silver and obviously very old. I recognized the cross as being of the ancient Irish or Gaelic design, rounded and with a circle in the center where the arms joined. There was a note in a delicate hand that I knew well, since I'd saved every scrap of paper I'd ever received from her.

*"Wear this for me always and say nothing to anyone.*

"Can you imagine how marvelous life seemed? The next hunt morning was so fine it could hardly have been exceeded. But even if it had been terrible and I'd broken a leg, I don't think I'd have noticed. I was wearing Betty's family token, sent to *me,* secretly under my shirt, and I came very close to singing aloud. She said nothing to me, save for polite banalities, and she looked tired, as if she'd not slept too well.

"As we rode past a lovely field of gathered shocks of maize, your 'corn,' you know, I noticed all the jolly pumpkins still left lying about in the fields and asked my nearest neighbor, one of the younger cousins, if the local kids didn't use them for Hallowe'en as I'd been told in the papers.

" 'Today?' he said, and then gobbled the same words used by the old huntsman, 'Sam Haines,' or perhaps 'Hayne.'

" 'We don't call it that,' he added stiffly and before I could ask why or anything else, spurred his horse and rode ahead. I was beginning to wonder, in a vague sort of way, if all this isolation really could be good for people. Canler and Betty seemed increasingly moody and indeed the whole crowd appeared subject to odd moods.

*"Perhaps a bit inbred,* I thought. *I must try and get Betty out of here.* Now apparently I'd offended someone by mentioning Hallowe'en, which, it occurred to me in passing, was that very evening. 'Sam Haines' indeed!

"Well, I promptly forgot all that when we found, located a fox, you know, and the chase started. It was a splendid one and long, and we had a very late lunch. I got a good afternoon rest, since Canler had told me we were having a banquet that evening. 'A farewell party for you, Donald,' he said, 'and a special one. We don't dress up much, but tonight we'll have a sort of hunt ball, eh?'

"I'd seen no preparations for music, but the Big House was so really big that the London Symphony could have been hidden somewhere about.

"I heard the dinner gong as I finished dressing, and when I came down to the main living room, all were assembled, the full hunt, with all the men in their soft-emerald green dress coats, to

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which my blue made a mild contrast. To my surprise, a number of children, although not small ones, were there also, all in party dress, eyes gleaming with excitement. Betty looked lovely in an emerald evening dress, but also very wrought up, and her eyes did not meet mine. Once again, a tremendous desire to protect her and get her out of this interesting but rather curious clan came over me.

"But Can was pushing his way through the throng and he took me by the elbow. 'Come and be toasted, Donald, as the only outsider,' he said, smiling. 'Here's the family punch and the family punch bowl too, something few others have ever seen.'

"At a long table in a side alcove, stood an extraordinary bowl, a huge stone thing, with things like runes scratched around the rim. Behind it, in his 'greens,' but bareheaded, stood the little withered huntsman, McColl. It was he who filled a squat goblet, but as he did so and handed it to me, his eyes narrowed, and he hissed something inaudible over the noise behind me. It looked like 'watch'! I was alerted, and when he handed me the curious stone cup, I knew why. There was a folded slip of paper under the cup's base, which I took as I accepted the cup itself. Can, who stood just behind me, could have seen nothing.

"I'm rather good at conjuring tricks, and it was only a moment before I was able to pass my hand over my forehead and read the note at the same instant. The message was simple, the reverse of Alice's on the bottle.

" '*Drink nothing.*' That was all, but it was enough to send a thrill through my veins. I was sure of two things. McColl had never acted this way on his own hook. Betty, to whom the man was obviously devoted, was behind this. And something else, too.

"I was in danger. I knew it. All the vague uneasiness I had suppressed during my stay, the peculiar stares, the cryptic remarks, the attitude of the local minister we had seen, all coalesced into something ominous, inchoate but menacing. These cold, good-looking people were not my friends, if indeed they were anyone's. I looked casually about while pretending to sip from my cup. Between me and each one of the three exits, a group of men were standing, chatting and laughing, accepting drinks from trays passed by servants, but *never moving*. As my brain began to race overtime, I actually forgot my warning and sipped from my drink. It was like nothing I have had before or since, being pungent, sweet and at the same time almost perfumed, but not in an unpleasant way. I managed to avoid swallowing all but a tiny bit, but even that was wildly exhilarating, making my

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face flush and the blood roar through my veins. It must have showed, I expect, for I saw my host half smile and others too, as they raised their cups to me. The sudden wave of anger I felt did not show, but now I really commenced to think.

"I turned and presented my almost full goblet to McColl again as if asking for more. Without batting an eye, he *emptied* it behind the cover of the great bowl, as if cleaning out some dregs, and refilled it. The little chap had brains. As again I raised the cup to my lips, I saw the smile appear on Can's face once more. My back was to McColl, blocking him off from the rest of the room, and this time his rasping, penetrating whisper was easy to hear.

" 'After dinner, be paralyzed, stiff, frozen in your seat. You can't move, understand?'

"I made a circle with my fingers behind my back to show I understood, and then walked out into the room to meet Canler who was coming toward me.

" 'Don't stand at the punch all evening, Donald,' he said, laughing. 'You have a long night ahead, you know.' But now his laughter was mocking, and his lean, handsome face was suddenly a mask of cruelty and malign purpose. As we moved about together, the faces and manners of the others, both men and women, even the children and servants, were the same, and I wondered that I had ever thought of any of them as friendly. Under their laughter and banter, I felt contempt, yes, and hatred and triumph too, mixed with a streak of pure nastiness. I was the stalled ox, flattered, fattened and fed, and the butchers were amused. They knew my fate, but I would not know until the door of the abattoir closed behind me. But the ox was not quite helpless yet, nor was the door quite slammed shut. I noticed Betty had gone, and when I made some comment or other, Can laughed and told me she was checking dinner preparations, as indeed any hostess might. I played my part as well as I could, and apparently well enough. McColl gave me bogus refills when we were alone, and I tried to seem excited, full of *joie de vivre,* you know. Whatever other effect was expected was seemingly reserved for after dinner.

"Eventually, about nine I should think, we went in to dinner, myself carefully shepherded between several male cousins. These folk were not leaving much to chance, whatever their purpose.

"The great dining room was a blaze of candles and gleaming silver and crystal. I was seated next to Betty at one end of the long table, and Canler took the other. Servants began to pour wine and the dinner commenced. At first, the conversation and laughter

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were, to outward appearances, quite normal. The shrill laughter of the young rose above the deeper tones of their elders. Indeed the sly, feral glances of the children as they watched me surreptitiously were not the least of my unpleasant impressions. Once again and far more strongly, the feeling of being in a den of some savage and predatory brutes returned to me, nor, this time, did it leave.

"At my side, Betty was the exception. Her face never looked lovelier, ivory white in the candle glow, and calm, as if whatever had troubled her earlier had gone. She did not speak much, but her eyes met mine frankly, and I felt stronger, knowing that in the woman I loved, whatever came, I had at least one ally.

"I have said that as the meal progressed, so too did the quiet. I had eaten a fairish amount, but barely tasted any of the wines from the battery of glasses at my place. As dessert was cleared off, amid almost total silence, I became aware that I had better start playing my other role, for every eye was now trained at my end of the table.

"Turning to the girl, an unmarried cousin, on my other side, my right, I spoke slowly and carefully, as one intoxicated.

"'My goodness, that punch must have been strong! I can scarcely move my hand, d'you know. Good thing we don't have to ride tonight, eh?'

"Whatever possessed me to say *that,* I can't think, but my partner stared at me and then broke into a peal of cold laughter. As she did so, choking with her own amusement, the man on her far side, who had heard me also, repeated it to his neighbors. In an instant the whole table was a-ripple with sinister delight, and I could see Can at the far end, his white teeth gleaming as he caught the joke. I revolved my head slowly and solemnly in apparent puzzlement, and the laughter grew. I could see two of the waiters laughing in a far corner. And then it ceased.

"A great bell or chime tolled somewhere, not too far off, and there was complete silence as if by magic. Suddenly I was aware of Canler, who had risen at his place and had raised his hands, as if in an invocation.

"'The hour returns,' he cried. 'The Blessed Feast is upon us, the Feast of Sam'hain. My people, hence to your duties, to your robes, to the sacred park of the *Sheade!* Go, for the hour comes and passes!'

"It was an effort to sit still while this rigmarole went on, but I remembered the earlier warnings and froze in my seat, blinking stupidly. It was as well, for four of the men servants, all large, now stood behind and be-

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side my chair. In an instant the room was empty, save for these four, myself and my host, who now strode the length of the table to stare down at me, his eyes filled with anger and contempt. Before I could even move, he had struck me over the face with his open hand.

" 'You, you English boor, would raise your eyes to the last princess of the Firbolgs, whose stock used yours as the meat and beasts of burden they are before Rome was even a village! Last year we had another one like you, and his polo-playing friends at Hicksville are still wondering where he went!' He laughed savagely and struck me again. I can tell you chaps, I learned real self-control in that moment! I never moved, but gazed up at him, my eyes blank, registering vacuous idiocy.

" 'The mead of the *Dagda* keeps its power,' he said. 'Bring him along, you four, the Great Hour passes!'

"Keeping limp, I allowed myself to be lifted and carried from the room. Through the great dark house, following that false friend, its master, we went, until at last we climbed a broad stairway and emerged under the frosty October stars. Before us lay the towering, overgrown hedge, and now I learnt the secret of it. A great gate, overgrown with vines so as to be invisible when shut, had been opened, and before me lay the hidden place of the House of Waldron. This is what I saw:

"An avenue of giant oaks marched a quarter mile to a circular space where towered black tumuli of stone rose against the night sky. As I was borne toward these monoliths, the light of great fires was kindled on either side as I passed, and from them came an acrid, evil reek which caught at the throat. Around and over them leapt my fellow dinner guests and the servants, wearing scanty, green tunics, young and old together, their voices rising in a wild screaming chant, unintelligible, but regular and rhythmic. Canler had vanished momentarily, but now I heard his voice ahead of us. He must have been gone longer than I thought, for when those carrying me reached the circle of standing stones, he was standing outlined against the largest fire of all, which blazed, newly kindled, behind him. I saw the cause of the horrid stench, for instead of logs, there were burning white, dry bones, a great mountain of them. Next to him stood Betty and both of them had their arms raised and were singing the same wild chant as the crowd.

"I was slammed to the ground by my guards but held erect and immovable so that I had a good chance to examine the two heirs of the finest families in the modern United States.

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"Both were barefoot and wore thigh-length green tunics, his apparently wool, but hers silk or something like it, with her ivory body gleaming through it almost as if she were nude. Upon her breasts and belly were marks of gold, like some strange, uncouth writing, clearly visible through the gauzy fabric. Her black hair was unbound and poured in waves over her shoulders. Canler wore upon his neck a massive circular torque, also of gold, and on his head a coronal wreath, apparently of autumn leaves. In Betty's right hand was held a golden sceptre, looking like a crude attempt to form a giant stalk of wheat, She waved this in rhythm as they sang.

"Behind me the harsh chorus rose in volume, and I knew the rest of the pack, for that's how I thought of them, were closing in. The noise rose to a crescendo, then ceased. Only the crackling of the great, reeking fire before me broke the night's silence. Then Canler raised his hands again in invocation and began a solitary chant in the strange harsh tongue they had used before. It was brief, and when it came to an end, he spoke again, but in English this time.

" 'I call to Sam'hain, Lord of the Dead, I, Tuathal, the Seventieth and One Hundred, of the line of Miled, of the race of Goedel Glas, last true *Ardr'i* of ancient Erin, Supreme Vate of the *Corcu Firbolgi*. Oh, Lord from Beyond, who has preserved my ancient people and nourished them in plenty, the bonefires greet the night, your sacrifice awaits you!' He fell silent and Betty stepped forward. In her left hand she now held a small golden sickle, and very gently she pricked my forehead three times, in three places. Then she stepped back and called out in her clear voice.

" 'I, Morrigu, Priestess and Bride of the Dead, have prepared the sacrifice. Let the Horses of the Night attend!'

"D'you know, all I could think of was some homework I'd done on your American Constitution, in which Washington advocated separation of church and state? The human mind is a wonderful thing! Quite apart from the reek of the burning bones, though, I knew a stench of a spiritual sort. I was seeing something old here, old beyond knowledge, old and evil. I felt that somehow not only my body was in danger.

"Now I heard the stamp of hooves. From one side, snorting and rearing, a great black horse was led into the firelight by a half-naked boy, who had trouble with the beast, but still held him. The horse was saddled and bridled, and I knew him at once. It was Bran, the hunter I'd been lent all week. Behind him, I could hear other horses moving.

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" 'Mount him,' shouted Canler, or Tuathal, as he now called himself. With that, I was lifted into the saddle, where I swayed, looking as doped and helpless as I could. Before I could move, my hands were caught and lashed together at the wrists with leather cords, then in turn tied loosely to the headstall, giving them a play of some inches but no more. The reins were looped up and knotted. Then my host stepped up to my knee and glared up at me.

" 'The Wild Hunt rides, Slave and Outlander! You are the quarry, and two choices lie before you, both being death. For if we find you, death by these,' and he waved a curious spear, short and broad in the blade.

" 'But *others* hunt on this night, and maybe when Those Who Hunt Without Riders come upon your track, you will wish for these points instead. Save for children's toys, the outside world has long forgotten their Christian Feast of All Hallows. How long then have they forgotten that which inspired it, ten thousand and more years before the Nazarene was slain? Now—ride and show good sport to the Wild Hunt!'

"With that someone gave Bran a frightful cut over the croup, and he bounded off into the dark, almost unseating me in the process. I had no idea where we were going, except that it was not back down the avenue of trees and the blazing fires. But I soon saw that at least two riders were herding me away at an angle down the hill, cutting at Bran's flanks with whips when he veered from the course they had set. Twice the whips caught my legs, but the boots saved me from the worst of it.

"Eventually, we burst out into a glade near the southern spur of the mountain, and I saw that another, smaller gate had been opened in the great hedge. Through this my poor brute was flogged, but once through it, I was alone. The Big House was invisible around a curve of the hill, and no lights marked its presence.

" 'Ride hard, Englishman,' called one of my herdsmen. 'Two deaths follow on your track.' With that, they turned back and I heard the gate slam. At the same time, I heard something else. Far off in the night I heard the shrill whinnying of a horse. Mingled with it and nearer was the sound of a horn, golden and clear. The horse cry was like that of no horse I have ever heard, a savage screaming noise which cut into my ear drums and raised the hackles even further on my neck. At the same time I made a new discovery.

"Some sharp thing had been poking into my left thigh ever since I was placed on the horse.

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Even in the starlight I now could see the reason. The haft of a heavy knife projected under my leg, apparently taped to the saddle! By stretching and bending my body, I could just free it, and once free, I cut the lead which tethered my wrists to the headstall. As I did so, I urged Bran with my knees downhill and to the right, keeping close to the trees which grew unclipt at the base of the mountain spur. I knew there was little time to waste, for the sound of galloping horses was coming through the night, far off, but drawing nearer by the instant! It might be the Twentieth Century outside the valley, but I knew it would be the last of me if that pack of green-clad maniacs ever caught up with me. The Wild Hunt was not a joke at this point!

"As I saw it, I had three secret assets. One, the knife, a sturdy piece of work with an eight-inch blade, which I now held in my teeth and tried to use to saw my wrists free. The other was the fact that I have a good eye for ground and I had ridden the length and breadth of the valley for a week. While not as familiar with the area as those who now hunted me over it like a rabbit, I was, nevertheless, not a stranger and I fancied I could find my way even at night. My third ace was Betty. What she could do, I had no idea, but I felt sure she would do something.

"The damned leather cords simply could not be cut while Bran moved, even at a walk, and I simply was forced to stop. It only took a second's sawing, for the knife was sharp, and I was free. I was in deep shadows, and I listened intently, while I unknotted the reins.

"The sound of many horses galloping was still audible through the quiet night, but it was no nearer, indeed the reverse. It now came from off to my left and somewhat lower down the valley. I was baffled by this, but only for a moment. Canler and his jolly group wanted a good hunt. Drugged as I was supposed to be, it would never do to follow directly on my track. Instead, they were heading to cut me off from the mouth of the valley, after which they could return at leisure and hunt me down. All of this and much more passed through my mind in seconds, you know.

"My next thought was the hills. In most places the encircling wall of mountain was far too steep for a horse. But I could leave Bran behind, and most of the ground ought to be possible for an active chap on foot. By dawn I could be well out of reach of this murderous gang. As the thought crossed my mind, I urged Bran toward the nearest wall of rock. We crossed a little glade and approached the black mass of the slope, shrouded in more trees at

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the base, and I kept my eye peeled for trouble. But it was my mount who found it.

"He suddenly snorted and checked, stamping his feet, refusing to go a foot forward. I drew the knife from my belt, also alerted, and by a sudden awakening of a sense far older than anything merely physical. Ahead of us lay a menace of a different sort than the hunters of Waldrondale. I remembered my quondam host, threatening me that something else was hunting that night, and also the men who had driven me through the hedge called after me that *two* deaths were on my track.

"Before me, as I sat, frozen in the saddle, something moved in the shadows. It was large, but its exact shape was not easy to make out. I was conscious of a sudden feeling of intense cold, something I've experienced once or twice. I now know this to mean that one of what I'll call an Enemy from Outside, a foe of the spirit, is about. On my breast there was a feeling of heat, as if I'd been burnt by a match. It was where I wore Betty's gift. The cross, too, was warning me. Then, two dim spots of yellow phosphorescence glowed at a height even with mine. A hard sound like a hoof striking a stone echoed once.

"That was enough for Bran! With a squeal of fright which sounded more like a hare than a blood horse, he turned and bolted. If I had not freed my hands, I would have been thrown off in an instant, and as it was I had the very devil of a time staying on. He was not merely galloping, but bounding, gathering his quarters under him with each stride as if to take a jump. Only sheer terror can make a trained horse so forget himself.

"I did my best to guide him, for through the night I heard the golden questing note of a horn. The Wild Hunt was drawing the coverts. They seemed to be quite far down the valley, and fortunately Bran was running away across its upper part, in the same direction as the Big House.

"I caught a glimpse of its high, lightless gables, black against the stars as we raced over some open ground a quarter mile below it, then we were in the trees again, and I finally began to master the horse, at length bringing him to a halt. Once again, as he stood, sweating and shivering, I used my ears. At first there was nothing, then, well down the vale to my right front came the sound of the questing horn. I was still undiscovered.

"You may wonder, as I did at first, why I had heard no hounds. Surely it would have been easy for this crew to keep some bloodhounds, or perhaps to smear my clothes or horse with anise and use their own thoroughbred fox-

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hounds. I can only say I don't know. At a guess, and mind you, it's only a guess, there were other powers or elements loose that night which might have come into conflict with a normal hunting pack. But that's only a guess. Still, there were none, and though I was not yet sure of it, I was fairly certain, for even the clumsiest hound should have been in full cry on my track by now. The Wild Hunt then, seemed to hunt at sight. Again the clear horn note sounded. They were working up the slope in my direction.

"As quietly as possible, I urged Bran, who now seemed less nervous, along the edge of the little wood we were in and down the slope. We had galloped from the hill spur on the right, as one faced away from the house, perhaps two thirds of the way across the valley, which at this point was some two miles wide. Having tried one slope and met—well, whatever I *had* met, I would now try the other.

"My first check came at a wooden fence. I didn't dare jump such a thing at night, as much for the noise as for the danger of landing badly. But I knew there were gates. I dismounted and led Bran along until I found one, and then shut it carefully behind me. I had not heard the mellow horn note for some time and the click of the gate latch sounded loud in the frosty night. Through the large field beyond I rode at a walk. There was another gate at the far side, and beyond that another dark clump of wood. It was on the edge of this that I suddenly drew rein.

"Ahead of me, something was moving down in the wood. I heard some bulky creature shoulder into a tree trunk and the sound of heavy steps. It might have been another horse from the sound. But at the same moment, up the slope behind me, not too far away came the thud of hooves on the ground, many hooves. The horn note blew, not more than two fields away, by the sound. I had no choice and urged Bran forward into the trees. He did not seem too nervous, and went willingly enough. The sound ahead of me ceased, and then, as I came to a tiny glade in the heart of the little wood, a dim shape moved ahead of me. I checked my horse and watched, knife ready.

" 'Donald?' came a soft voice. Into the little clearing rode Betty, mounted on a horse as dark as mine, her great black mare. I urged Bran forward to meet her.

" 'I've been looking for you for over an hour,' she whispered, her breath warm on my cheek. I was holding her as tightly as I could, our mounts standing side by side, amiably sniffing one another. 'Let me go, Donald, or we'll both be dead. There's a chance, a thin one if we go the way I've thought out.'

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She freed herself and sat looking gravely at me. My night vision was good and I could see she had changed into a simple tunic of what looked like doeskin and soft, supple, knee boots. Socketed in a sling was one of the short, heavy spears, and I reached over and took it. The very heft of it made me feel better. The glimmering blade seemed red even in the dim tree light, and I suddenly realized the point was bronze. These extraordinary people went in for authenticity in their madness.

" 'Come on, quickly,' she said and wheeled her horse back the way she had come. I followed obediently and we soon came to the edge of the forest. Before us lay another gentle slope, but immediately beneath us was a sunken dirt road, which meandered away to the left and downhill, between high banks, their tops planted with hedge. We slid down a sandy slope, and our horses began to walk along the road, raising hardly any dust. Betty rode a little ahead, her white face visible as she turned to look back at intervals. Far away a cock crowed, but I looked at my watch and it was no more than 3 AM. I could hear nothing uphill and the horn was silent. We rode through a little brook, only inches deep. Then, as we had just passed out of hearing of the gurgle of the stream, a new sound broke the quiet night.

"It was somewhere between a whinny and a screech, and I remembered the noise I had heard as the two riders had driven me through the hedge. If one could imagine some unthinkable horse creature screaming at the scent of blood, eagerly, hungrily seeking its prey, well, that's the best I can do to describe it.

" 'Come on, we have to ride for our lives!' Betty hissed. 'They have let the Dead Horse loose. No one can stand against that.'

"With that, she urged her mount into a gallop and I followed suit. We tore along the narrow track between the banks, taking each twist at a dead run, always angling somehow downhill and toward the valley mouth.

"Then, the road suddenly went up and I could see both ahead and back. Betty reined up and we surveyed our position. At the same time the horn blew again, but short, sharp notes this time, and a wild screaming broke out. Three fields back up the long gentle slope, the Wild Hunt had seen our black outlines on the little swell where we paused. I could see what looked like a dozen horsemen coming full tilt and the faint glitter of the spears. But Betty was looking back down along our recent track.

"From out of the dark hollows came a vast grunting noise, like that of a colossal pig sighting the swill pail. It was very close.

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"Betty struck her horse over the withers and we started to gallop again in real earnest. Bran was tired, but he went on nobly, and her big mare simply flew. The Hunt was silent now, but I knew they were still coming. And I knew too, that something else was coming. Almost, I felt a cold breath on my back, and I held the spear tightly against Bran's neck.

"Suddenly, Betty checked, so sharply that her horse reared, and I saw why as I drew abreast. We had come very close to the mouth of the valley and a line of fires lay before us, not three hundred yards away on the open flat. Around them moved many figures, and even at this distance I could see that a cordon was established, yet from the hats and glint of weapons, I knew they were not the Waldrons or their retainers. Apparently the outside world was coming to Waldrondale, at least this far. We had a fighting chance.

"Between us and the nearest fire, a black horseman rode at us, and he was only a hundred feet off. The raised spear and the bare head told me that at least one of the valley maniacs had been posted to intercept me, in the unlikely event of my getting clear of the rest.

"I spurred the tired hunter forward and gripped the short spear near its butt end, as one might a club. The move was quite instinctive. I knew nothing of spears but I was out to kill and I was a six-goal polo player. The chap ahead, some Waldron cousin, I expect, needed practice, which he never got. He tried to stab at me, overhand, but before our horses could touch, I had swerved and lashed out as I would on a long drive at the ball. The heavy bronze edge took him between the eyes and, really, that was that. His horse went off to one side alone.

"Wheeling Bran, I started to call to Betty to come on, and as I did, I saw that which she had so feared had tracked us down.

"I am still not entirely certain of what I saw, for I have the feeling that part of it was seen with what Asiatics refer to as the Third Eye, the inner 'eye' of the soul.

"The girl sat, a dozen yards from me, facing something which was advancing slowly upon us. They had called it the Dead Horse, and its shifting outlines indeed at moments seemed to resemble a monstrous horse, yet at others, some enormous and distorted pig. The click of what seemed hooves was clear in the night. It had an unclean color, an oily shifting, dappling of grey and black. Its pupilless eyes, which glowed with a cold, yellow light, were fixed upon Betty, who waited as if turned to stone. Whatever it was, it had no place

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in the normal scheme of things. A terrible cold again came upon me and time seemed frozen. I could neither move nor speak, and Bran trembled, unmoving between my legs.

"My love broke the spell. Or it broke her. God knows what it must have cost her to defy such a thing, with the breeding she had, and the training. At any rate, she did so. She shouted something I couldn't catch, apparently in that pre-Gaelic gibberish they used and flung out her arm as if striking at the monster. At the same instant it sprang, straight at her. There was a confused sound or sounds, a sort of *spinning*, as if an incredible top were whirling in my ear, and at the same instant my vision blurred.

"When I recovered myself, I was leaning over Bran's neck, clutching him to stay on, and Betty lay silent in the pale dust of the road. A yard away lay her horse, also unmoving. And there was nothing else.

"As I dismounted and picked her up, I knew she was dead, and that the mare had died in the same instant. She had held the thing from Outside away, kept it off me, but it had claimed a price. The high priestess of the cult had committed treason and sacrilege, and her life was the price. Her face was smiling and peaceful, the ivory skin unblemished, as if she were asleep.

"I looked up at the sound of more galloping hoofbeats. The Wild Hunt, all utterly silent, were rounding a bend below me and not more than a hundred yards away. I lifted Betty easily, for she was very light, and mounted. Bran still had a little go left, and we headed for the fires, passing the dead man lying sprawled in his kilt or whatever on the road. I was not really afraid any longer, and as I drew up at the fire where a dozen gun barrels pointed at me, it all felt unreal. I looked back and there was an empty hill, a barren road. The riders of Waldrondale had vanished, having turned back apparently at the sight of the fires and the armed men.

" 'He's not one! Look at the gal! That crowd must have been hunting *him*. Call the parson over or Father Skelton, one of you. Keep a sharp lookout, now!'

"It was a babble of voices and like a dream. I sat staring stupidly down and holding Betty against my heart until I realized a man was pulling at my knees and talking insistently. I began to wake up then, and looking down, recognized the minister I had seen when Betty and I had ridden past a day earlier. I could not remember his name, but I handed Betty down to him when he asked for her, as obediently as a child.

" 'She saved me, you know,' I said brightly. 'She left them and

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saved me. But the Dead Horse got her. That was too much, you see. She was only a girl, couldn't fight *that*. You do see, don't you?' This is what I am told I said at any rate, by Mr. Andrews, the Episcopal minister of the little Church of the Redeemer. But that was later. I remember none of it.

"When I woke, in the spare bed of the rectory the next day, I found Andrews sitting silently by my bed. He was looking at my bare breast on which lay the little Celtic cross. He was fully dressed, tired and unshaven, and he reeked of smoke, like a dead fireplace, still full of coals and wood ash.

"Before I could speak, he asked me a question. 'Did she, the young lady, I mean, give you that?'

" 'Yes,' I said. 'It may have saved me. Where is she?'

" 'Downstairs, in my late wife's room. I intend to give her a Christian burial, which I never would have dreamt possible. But she has been saved to us.'

" 'What about the rest of that crowd?' I said. 'Can nothing be done?'

"He looked calmly at me. 'They are all dead. We have been planning this for three years. That Hell spawn have ruled this part of the country since the Revolution. Governors, senators, generals, all Waldrons, and everyone else afraid to say a word.' He paused. 'Even the young children were not saved. Old and young are in that place behind the house. We took nothing from the house but your clothes. The hill folk, who live to the West came down on them just before dawn, as we came up. Now there is a great burning, the house, the groves, everything. The State Police are coming, but several bridges are out for some reason, and they will be quite a time.' He fell silent, but his eyes gleamed. The prophets of Israel were not all dead.

"Well, I said a last good-bye to Betty and went back to Washington. The police never knew I was there at all, and I was apparently as shocked as anyone to hear that a large gang of bootleggers and Chicago gangsters had wiped out one of America's first families and got away clean without being captured. It was a six day sensation and then everyone forgot it. I still have the little cross, you know, and that's all."

We sat silent, all brooding over this extraordinary tale. Like all of the brigadier's tales, it seemed too fantastic for human credibility, and yet—and *yet*!

The younger member who had spoken earlier could not resist one question, despite Ffellowes' prestory ban on such things.

"Well, sir," he now said. "Why, this means that one of the oldest royal families in the world, far more ancient than King Ar-

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thur's, say, is only recently extinct. That's absolutely amazing!"

Ffellowes looked up from his concentration on the rug and seemed to fix his gaze on the young man. To my amazement he did not become irritated. In fact, he was quite calm and controlled.

"Possibly, possibly," he said, "but of course they all appear to have been Irish or at least Celts of some sort or other. I have always considered their reliability open to considerable doubt."

## CLEAN-UP

Morning, my trashman,
wears purposeful shoes.
With a spiked stick
he stabs that banana peel
dropped by your poet fingers
in sheerest negligence.
("Never in malice," I cry
but my voice is uncertain.
*Would* you have laughed at a pratfall?)
Morning picks up
the wrinkled skin of a balloon we launched
calling it Icarus,
stuffs it inside a bag
to dangle from his shoulder.
That is enough to ask of any morning.

—Doris Pitkin Buck

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*This story concerns itself with a lot more than its basic narrative notion, but the notion itself is irresistible: The space program has come to a mysterious halt in the area of Saturn's largest satellite. A manned flight is sent to investigate; the three-man crew consists of pilot, demonologist and astrologer . . .*

# MAKING TITAN

## *by Barry N. Malzberg*

NOW THERE IS NOTHING TO DO but wait. He has plotted it out, three moons in the House of Jupiter, a hint of tilting for chance, other manipulations. He has taken into account the wind, the tides, the celestial weather; now it is only a question of seeing it all proven or, worse yet, foundering; but for some reason Kharsh cannot sit back on it, cannot resign himself to the articulation of the already known. It is a new sensation, one which he knows he will have to come to terms with in some intricate way back on earth, but for the time being he has merely integrated it into the larger problem, the overall set, and hopes that it will go away. Looking through the smudged window of the craft, seeing the slow wheel of space opening up on all sides of him, the immensity of that damned planet as it shows up larger and larger, no hint of rings now, only dust, Kharsh has had to accept for the first time what was purely unacceptable before, and that is this: it is too large. It is unspeakably bleak and it encompasses. It is one thing to work this out on a zodiacal frame, all of it abstraction, terms to be manipulated, but another entirely to see what it looks like, and he knows that if he were not an extraordinarily strong and assured man he would have already given under the stress. Perhaps the whole purpose of the mission—the cunning of the agency!—has not been so much to use him as to reduce him, force him to renounce all



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principles of astrology at some crucial moment of connection and hurl all of the charts from him in a fit of destruction, able to articulate only random lunacies about the vastness. But he will not permit this to happen. He has worked too long, he has struggled too hard, the responsiblity on him is too great. He can expect nothing from the others.

He cannot stand the others. The captain has always touched off in Kharsh some vague revulsion. Perhaps it has to do with the antipathy of mysticism toward natural science, but more likely it is this. He has always felt inferior toward women, and the captain personifies the kind of man who has always made Kharsh's inner life so difficult: a big, blankly handsome man whose very hands seem to be made for grabbing breasts and whose wife—whom he met only once—radiates a kind of sensuality and dependence which drives Kharsh toward fury, so oblivious does she seem of the tragic limitations in the captain, which he has known from the start. But all the time Kharsh has been working, building himself up for this enormous moment of vindication, it is likely to assume that the captain has been screwing. He has been screwing since puberty and maybe a little bit before that, and nothing has touched him, only a crinkle of exhaustion around the eyes, perhaps a vague tremor in his voice when he talks of women; otherwise, for all the apparent difference between them the captain could have been in isolation for decades and Kharsh the one who had been knocking off the tail. But it had not been that way at all. In the dim, noisome compact of the spaceship it would be possible to believe that all differences were ameliorated, but the basic understanding persists between Kharsh and the captain, and both of them know it: Kharsh has had no luck with women, the captain's has been exceptional. Or on the other hand, and worse yet, the captain's luck has been only average, and thus he is unequipped to deal with Kharsh's envy because, in his mind, he has accomplished nothing. It is an old problem and Kharsh knows that he will have to reach a point, someday, when he will cease sentimentalizing sex, but that time has not yet come. He is only 42. He needs too much.

Rakos is another situation. What lies between himself and Rakos is neither revulsion nor fear nor envy, but the simple deadly hatred of rival professionals who find their opposite's view of the universe intolerable. Nothing else is of any significance, although Kharsh finds a certain physical hatred has also come out of this; they are in very close quarters in the spaceship, and he cannot

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stand Rakos' smell, Rakos' gestures. But these are merely symptoms. The real problem is that if Rakos' vision of the universe is complete and correct, Kharsh has spent 20 years working out of a series of lies. The same is true of the captain of course, but the captain is a simple rationalist, the kind of man with whom he has been successfully dealing all his life. Rakos however is in a rival specialty. He is a demonologist.

He knows there will be no answers. They will either land on Titan or like all the rest of them sink into the ether at some anguished point and never be heard of again. If they prevail, if they make this landing, it will only be because of Kharsh's careful charts and allowances, but they will always be suspect because Rakos has his pentagrams and has been conjuring fire. He will take the credit. On the other hand, if they perish, sinking past some coalescence in space, the captain will have to take the credit since he is only the most recent in a succession of test pilots, all of whom have had the same disaster. Without support, of course. The thing is, however, that at this moment, only hours out of Titan, with two weeks behind them, with this cataclysmic vindication of all that he has believed almost upon them, at this moment Kharsh is not sure that he wants to go through with it, that he wants to win through. There would somehow be more satisfaction for him if the ship were extinguished because it would prove that although he was not right Rakos was not right either, and he thinks that he may need his enemy's defeat more than his own vindication. It is difficult and complex, and a sensation of winds seems to pass through the craft, winds only in his inner ear of course, as he stumbles to his feet and hands the latest series of charts to the captain.

Rearing above his wife on that last night he had held her, the captain had had a vision. The vision was of Titan, moon of Saturn, swimming thickly over him, his haze of desire somehow having become the gaseous atmosphere of the planet itself; and reaching for her breast trying to move more deeply in her, he had moaned: *the moon, the moon,* not knowing if he was talking of the mission or only of some emotional chasm within him which contained the image. His orgasm was more a gathering than unfolding; he then fell on top of her dreamily, pinning her with his weight, thinking of Saturn's terrain and the moon from which they would have to conquer it. He has at this moment no fear, it is the first time in days that he has felt this way, but the orgasm has drained him, left him open to vulnerability and detachment at once. He knows that

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one way or the other he will manage the task because the two lunatics who are going with him on this voyage are incompetent and will be in fetal positions long before the moment of connection. Of this he is sure if nothing else. He has been humiliated, manipulated, made ill use of; but the final triumph will be his because demonologist and astrologer both will look at him with a hushed, terrible dependency as he begins to set the controls for the plunge; and even if it is only death and entrapment which await them, as it has awaited all the others, he will have the satisfaction of knowing that of the three of them only he is in control. His wife mutters something indistinguishable. For a moment, so deep his concentration, he thinks that she has said she loved him, but she repeats it. He realizes that once again she is thinking of Rakos. "He's crazy, he's crazy, he wants to meet the devil," she says and he answers, "Only the devil in himself, the only devil we know," but this easy piece of metaphysics does not give him the closeted sense of satisfaction it had previously because he is slowly becoming aware, for the first time, of the fascination his wife feels toward the demonologist, a fascination tinged with, for all he knows, desire. So he says, "Well, well, it doesn't make any difference, out there everybody's the same; they don't understand that." She clasps him to her and bites his ear, saying, "I'm frightened, I'm so frightened," and he says, "I know," and she says, "You'd think they'd stop, you'd think that they would have had enough of it instead of sending men out there, particularly you." Then he says, as he has said before but now for the final time, "But, you see, I want to go out there. I want to go out there and land on Titan because we have got to prove that there is nothing wrong with our science, that there must have been some human failure or failure of the equipment. Men do not wink out of existence without logical basis, and there is nothing up there that we do not understand. It is all coming clear, merely we must extend what we know to encompass it." He thinks that never has he stated it so well and never has he been more aware of why Rakos and Kharsh, the little astrologer, must hate him. Rationality and mysticism, the devil and physics, the crumbling void and the maps of space; this is the basic opposition and there can be only one answer; although the fact that men dedicate their lives to avoiding it has always filled him with a solemn sense of terror. But he does not want to get any further into it. He is in too deep already, and so he only returns to his wife's breast, returns to the only manipulations he truly understands.

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Rakos draws the pentagram with a flourish and then steps back a few feet, as much space as he can give it, checks it from all angles, and then moves in to color its edges with chalk. Now that he has come so near this culmination, he finds that his heart is beating rapidly, his respiration seems sweaty and unpleasant, but this means far less to him than the necessity to get it right because once the process has begun there will certainly be no reversing it and a misplaced angle, any slight alteration from the structural formula, and the devil will leap from the center and devour all of them. In a sense, Rakos finds himself thrilled by this. It would be a satifactory vindication of everything he has believed and would, in the bargain, have an effect on the captain so spectacular that none of them, listening at base, would be able to doubt what he had done, but Rakos still thinks that he thinks too well of himself to look for triumph in disaster. Besides, the devil is the only way out of this, and Rakos knows that the devil will do their bidding, for vanity's reasons if none other. The pentagram goes swiftly now that he has established the basic design, and when he steps back, he knows that there is nothing more he can do. In due course he will chant the spells and summon the devil, and then they will see what happens.

He hates Kharsh. He wishes that there were some way in which he could communicate to Kharsh not only the full extent of his hatred but the reasons for it. The fact is that Kharsh is only codifying the captain's idiocies in another fashion, and there is no difference between them. Kharsh, no less than the captain and the system that has sent them there, believes in charts, believes in cause-and-effect, believes in rational principles underlying all disasters and successes; but in Kharsh's case his rationalism has been transmogrified into the work of a crank because only cranks or failed scientists would go into astrology in the first place; it is merely a bastardization of science without its rigor but with the same old shibboleths. There must be some way, he has often reflected, that he can make it clear to the captain that he and Rakos have more in common than Rakos and Kharsh; that Kharsh is merely another version of the scientists who have destroyed the other men. But to the captain this is deep reasoning and impossible to pursue. He feels himself to be hounded by lunatics on left and right, and there would be no way of convincing him that Rakos will be the salvation, while Kharsh will only sink into the stupefied fear that all of the others must have felt when their ships disappeared into the rings. Rakos has

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tried to have nothing to do with Kharsh during this voyage, but the quarters are small and occasionally they have been forced to exchange words. Fortunately he is the only one of them permitted to work in the single small room off the main cabin. He has made it known long in advance that spells must be cast in privacy. This and this alone has perhaps saved him from hounding madness and possibly a violent attack upon Kharsh.

He is ready now to summon the devil and can do it at any time, but at this critical instant he hesitates. They are still an hour or so away from entry fire, and as long as the devil is summoned anytime before this, he will accomplish their salvation. In the meantime, he does not want to waste time with extraneous dialogue. At least this is what Rakos tells himself. Inside he is honest and rational enough to admit that it is probably something else holding him back in the name of simple fear: he has, after all, never summoned the devil before. He has dreamt of him behind a thousand closed doors, has embraced him through a hundred nights, has seen his effect upon people, his work in the heavens themselves, but he has never spoken with or seen him, and he does not know, at this moment, if he is ready to do it. In the first place, he is not sure what he will say.

Granted that the devil has a certain limited omnipotence, he may be spared the exposition, of course. As a matter of fact he has counted on this because it would take him entirely too long to bring the devil up to date otherwise. What could he say, after all? *We've had six ships lost attempting to negotiate a landing on Titan; now the government has given up physics and is trying to do it the mystical way?* But that would hardly get into the complexity of the matter or make it understood that there is, in effect, no government any more but only this one enormous agency whose powers of decision are sheer reflex and which thus can be cleverly manipulated in almost any fashion. *We need your assistance in making a landing on Titan, the instruments seem to be failing?* That would hardly offer the devil any inducement. No, there has to be a simple cause-and-effect relationship, a promissory arrangement, as it were. But what has come upon Rakos slowly and with building intensity in these last hours is a question of simple forgetfulness. He hasn't the faintest idea of what to offer the devil. To summon him is one thing, and he has never doubted that he could do it; to negotiate is another. He has no bargaining position. Furthermore, it would be in the devil's nature to let them plunge into emptiness as have all the oth-

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ers; he can hardly appeal to the devil's sense of compassion.

Rakos is not sure what he is going to do. He kneels at last before the pentagram, tailor fashion, elbows hooked around his knees; and for a long, whirling time he looks at it while all of his history seems to overtake him until there is nothing but the pentagram before and emptiness behind. Somewhere in between the two he knows he will have to piece out a judgment, but there is seemingly no space, no space whatsoever.

Now he must talk to the captain, there is no way around it. He staggers from his bunk, enfolds the charts in his arms, and stumbles toward the forward part of the main cabin where the captain sits facing space, making computations on a sheet of paper, feeding tape into the computer. "Look here," Kharsh says, "we have to talk now."

"I can't talk," the captain says. "I'm preparing for the landing. Can't you see I'm busy?"

"But there are certain things which must be taken into account. The three moons—"

"I can't listen to that shit, don't you understand me!" the captain shouts and throws back a hand. His intention must have been only to remove Kharsh from his shoulder, but what happens is that he hits the charts, which scatter with a kind of hiss all through the cabin, then settle windlessly to the floor. "I warned you," the captain is saying, looking at his fist. "I warned you. I didn't want to do it."

"Now it's too late," Kharsh says and finds that he is screaming. "Now it's all too late. By the time I get those things back into order we'll be winked out. Do you want to die? Do you want to die, you son of a bitch?" He can never remember cursing before. Perhaps it has only to do with a sheltered existence.

"Listen," the captain says and turns full on him for the first time. It is as if, Kharsh feels, they have never truly looked upon one another before, and now, long past the point of possible contact, they have stripped one another bare. "Listen to me you old charlatan, you thief, you idiot. I didn't ask for either of you to be put on this craft and I don't have to listen to you. I'll make the maneuvers. I'll make the landing. You and Rakos stay in the other cabin and keep the door shut and don't make a sound or come out until we're down. If you don't do that I'll kill you. I mean it. I won't put up with it any more."

And in that instant, then, Kharsh sees all of it: the fullest implications, the total meaning of what not only he but all of them have been through, the reasons why they have been put on the craft, the reason why he went into

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astrology, the reason why Rakos took up demons. He sees all of this and more, and it is too much for him, entirely too much because nothing in or out of his science has equipped him to deal with it. "You want to die," he says. "Just like all the others. You want to die. You'd rather die than admit you can't deal with it, that's the whole of it."

"I'm going to make this landing," the captain says, "and after I've made it I'll deal with you. Now get away from me or I'll kill you." He draws a pistol, levels it on Kharsh, and closes his eyes in some trauma of concentration which Kharsh knows will be the last thing he will ever see unless he withdraws. "I won't put up with it," the captain says. "I won't put up with it any more."

And Kharsh withdraws. Now his charts are lying scattered throughout the cabin, crinkling, smudged, and on the verge of desiccation already, but he does not stop to pick them up. He does not go in with Rakos either. Instead he returns to his bunk and straddling it, falls on his back, eyes toward the ceiling, seeing the flatness, the faint overhanging mist in the atmosphere, knowing that this will be the last thing that he will ever see, and all for the better, all for the better, because his life has been a misdirection and he did not go into astrology for the right reasons after all. It was something else. And he does not want to touch it.

Rising from his wife on the last morning he had washed and dressed quickly, trying not to look at her, trying to be in all but the physical sense already somewhere else, but at breakfast he could not continue this and at a look found her against his chest sobbing, brushing her hair back from her eyes, clutching him. "I'm frightened," she had said. "I'm so terribly frightened. It's all gone crazy, hasn't it?" He was able only to nod slowly, a stricken yank of his head in accord because it was true and, in the bargain, he only wanted to pacify her. "We've gone back to barbarism," he had said. "It's all a question of a lapsed technology. We haven't really been able to live with it for centuries, and now the soothsayers point our way amidst the deadly machines, only themselves to say they see the light, but we need Titan," he had added. "We need Titan, we need the space, we've got to keep on going out even though it's all failed so far, everything. Only the damned ships, not the men, work any more, but we've got to try." He had realized that he had summed it up for her then as well as he was apt to for the rest of his life, and so he had finally removed himself from her and had stood, saying, "I think we've got to come to the end of

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this now. You'll hear from me all the way. We'll be in radio contact throughout and I'll come back and everything will be fine." "What about the others?" she had said then. "The five others that weren't fine?" There it was between them finally, and she said, "I do think you want to die; I think you want to make an end of yourself," and he said, "Don't worry, we've got a horoscope and a demon-sayer on board, and that'll get us through." They had begun to laugh then, laugh and laugh with sick, wrenching cries. As for the rest of it, how the hell he had gotten out of the house, what he had said to her, what pact they had made, what got him to the base itself, he had no idea. It was only a grey, dim space in which, like fish, swam qualities like dread, hope and loss; and if he could ever catch those fish, he would find their dull faces a mirror of his own: blind eyes gaping toward the starless night.

Rakos hears the sounds from the cabin, understands what they are about, but does not intervene. There is nothing that he can do. What these two men now understand about one another and themselves, he knew from the beginning. No, no, he is far beyond it. Out in some cove of his own, upon himself and no one else rests the responsibility for landing the mission safely; and now, locked into their postures, the other two cannot interfere. It is time to raise the devil and consult with him. It is time to make the pact that will land them upon the moon and open a new era of exploration and progress. But he cannot do it. He cannot make his body move.

He does not want to summon the devil, and at the realization of what he has been so simply putting beyond himself all these years he feels himself shudder, then assimilate it, and move on to a newer level of thinking. For all of his life, Rakos now understands, he has not wanted to raise the devil so much as himself, but now

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at the moment of confrontation he cannot go through with it, cannot truly come to terms with the understanding that out of the spaces of the pentagram may rise not so much the devil as some blasted vision of Rakos himself, eyes staring, mouth raving, hands clutching. Yes, he would not have understood how much cunning there had been in him, how much displacement; but now, working out in the far spaces, disconnected as he has never been, he is willing to make this admission, is willing to make a lot of admissions. Demonology may be a legitimate science or at least an art, but it was not legitimacy that drew him there but something else, something with which he cannot contend. The devil may or may not come out of the pentagram, but Rakos must be mute. He can ask no favors. The devil owes him nothing.

He feels a whirling in the ship, a hint of dislocation, and understands that they are going down. There is a shaking wrench and he understands further that the same thing is about to happen to them as has happened to the five other ships and that they will never be seen again. Perhaps it is death that is overtaking him, but it does not feel like death. It is some other quality, something which he cannot name, but he knows that the devil would understand, would be able to label it for him if they could speak. Too late he resolves to do it anyway, raise up Lucifer and have it done, but before he can move from the bunk something like a fist hits him in the center of the stomach, and his nerves gather around the blow and encircle it, bring it into his being. Then there is only sobbing, gasping, wrenching and pain. At the last moment then, Rakos understands almost everything, but it is far too late, of course, to tell the others and too early to make use of it himself.

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# BOOKS

PROFESSIONALLY SPEAKING, Anne McCaffrey is just a pup, as those who wish to read THE SHIP WHO SANG (Walker, $4.95) can verify for themselves. As late as 1966* Miss McCaffrey was indulging in plenty of slipper-worryings, barkings-at-nothing, and enthusiastic fallings-over-own-feet. For me one of the pleasures of reading SHIP is watching it progress from some rather awful gaucheries through the middling treatment of middling ideas to the two final sections in which the author at last begins to dramatize scenes with ease and some polish. But readers are not critics and may not find the eager awkwardness of the beginning as appealing as I do. It tickled me, for example, to hear a character remark gravely, "Such an A Caruso would have given the rest of his notes to sing," or to find that the heroine's first mission (she is a cyborg built into a spaceship) is to rush a vaccine to "a distant system plagued with a virulent spore disease," while her second leads to a tangle with "a minor but vicious narcotic ring in the Lesser Magellanics." Miss McCaffrey is infested with gremlins. My favorite in the whole book is the statement (on page 56) that "A second enormous stride forward in propagating the race of man occurred when a male sperm was scientifically united with female ova," a pronouncement that blends the impossible with the ineffable. It's true that these whoppers do not occur in the last third of the novel, but all the same, somebody (God, the author, Walker, the author's children) should have rewritten the first three episodes so that all the parts might be equally readable—and equally sensible.

For example, we are told that Helva, the heroine, is born deformed but that she spends her first three months enjoying "the usual routine of the infant." Anyone not *internally* deformed would be better off with prosthetics than with Helva's all-enveloping metal "shell"; moreover, Miss McCaffrey later insists that shell-people do not sleep, which is impossible, and

* *The date of magazine publication of the novel's second and third episodes. The first was published in 1961, the fourth and fifth in 1969, and the final episode appears only in the novel.*



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that her heroine has "no pain reflexes"—by itself a better reason for shell-life than lack of limbs. There is considerable description of the technology used to keep shell-people in their metal bodies, a long explanation of how Helva can sing, and many references to special conditioning, but some very important things are never explained. For one, an education that allows Helva to see her first normal human being at the age of fourteen does not seem practical for someone who will be spending much of her life working with human partners. I am also confused as to how a shell-person who has a microphone *in* or *at* her throat can produce consonants; Helva's voice is "instrumental rather than vocal" but the details are not clear. Most important, we are told that Helva is a deliberately dwarfed *but whole* woman. Leaving aside for a moment the problem of what happens to hair, fingernails, eyelashes, eyebrows, and dandruff inside a shell-person's nutrient bath, I find myself very curious about the one question the author never answers: is Helva sexually mature? We know she's sterile, but what about her ductless glands? If she is indeed a sexually mature woman, encapsulating her in a metal shell strikes me as a form of refined torture, and I do not think we are supposed to imagine that Central Worlds is that callous. On the other hand, she falls in love with her first "brawn" (human partner), as do other brain ships in the novel—one even tries to commit suicide for love. Perhaps shell-life agrees with women better than it does with men; at any rate, the few male cyborgs in the novel are presented as fussy, complaining types with over-inflected voices. I would also like to know what life without olfactory or tactile sensations does to the human psyche (compare Fritz Leiber's THE SILVER EGGHEADS). And why *does* Helva lack these? Couldn't those areas of the brain be turned to good account in reading gauges or sensing meteor swarms or whatever else one has to do to run a spaceship? (See Samuel Delany's NOVA.) At one point in the book the heroine briefly inhabits an alien body; one would think such an experience would be either devastating or addicting, but not much is made of it.

All these confusions seem to me to be the result of a lack of rewriting. In its last episode, when the book really picks up, when people lose their mechanically explanatory voices and start yelling at each other, when Helva finds her second love, a short, blunt-mannered, vain, fake-hard-boiled guy who's a bit of a dandy, SHIP turns into quite a good thing. Even at its silliest the book has a contagious joyfulness. An added pleasure: people's motives are usu-

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ally connected with love or family feeling, a respite from the war, commerce, and rivalry of the usual space romance. Write more of the same sort, say I.

But alas, what happens when you do? SATAN'S WORLD by Poul Anderson (Doubleday, $4.95) is one of what James Blish calls a template series—TRADER TO THE STARS appeared in 1964, and although WORLD may be the second in the series or the fifteenth (I am ignorant thereof), something unpleasant has happened to the template in between, and that something is weariness.

Poul Anderson can write rings around Anne McCaffrey and he makes an interesting and in places fascinating and moving book out of material she would cover (scratchily) in four pages. But he doesn't enjoy it. There is, in WORLD, a sense of sourness, of things gone stale and wrong. The characters' personalities have declined into mannerisms, and the mannerisms into tics. Adzel, who should be serene, is merely smug; Chee Lan, who should be explosive, is irritated and irritating; and David Falkayn, who began (if I remember correctly) as a charming mixture of eagerness and youthful cynicism, has become a cad when the author bothers to make him a character at all. Even Nicholas van Rijn, whose scrambled English remains amusing and sometimes brilliant, is more often just a greedy, lecherous, dirty-old-man.

Mr. Anderson has never minded jerry-building his stories, although he usually keeps the jerry-building in the beginning (the least worst place) and uses it, as here, to force-feed the reader as quickly as possible with the standard background of the standard characters and the few givens the story needs. There is a girl, I swear to God, clad in "a few wisps of iridescent cloth", who remarks that "none of us girls has traveled past Jupiter" and is described by the hero as "sophisticated." Characters lecture each other on what both of them already know. There is a line separating Anderson the Good from Anderson the Awful which Anderson the Author crosses with apparent unconcern, at one moment giving his hero "an animal alertness developed in countries for which man was never meant" and in the next describing a chief secretary "who was of a warrior caste in a tigerish species *and thus required to be without* fear" (italics mine). Or "four and a half meters of dragon following on tiptoe."

As one would expect of a series, the best things are the new ones made up for the occasion. The scenery is grand and the aliens are fine, although Mr. Anderson's aliens always seem to be violently belligerent no matter what kind of

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planet they live on or what sort of creatures they are: flying carnivores (a recent magazine series), freak herbivores (this book), or feline beings with women's faces (a past story). There are scattered remarks that are very provocative and insufficiently discussed, my favorite being "Vegetarian sophonts do not have purer souls than omnivores and carnivores. But their sins are different." Mr. Anderson also presents some apologetics for the Polesotechnic League (which apparently has not yet found out that a conspiracy in restraint of trade, as the technical term has it, pays more than competition) and remarks about government, evolution ("ruthlessly selective"), and the biological basis of personality which make me burst with impatience to refute them. There is one comment about "private war" that makes me long to send the author a copy of THE OREISTEIA and Hobbes' LEVIATHAN, postage due. Mr. Anderson should write prefaces, like Shaw's.

It is rude to make nasty noises about half-loaves to someone who must, after all, make a living from the stuff, but I would like to take this opportunity to register a personal *hwyl* on the subject of what Anderson the formalist has done to Anderson the artist. The novels he *could* write! The novels he *won't* write! If this goes on much longer, I shall burn my copy of THREE HEARTS AND THREE LIONS and expire amid the ashes. And it would not be so bad if the man were not—intermittently—so very, very good.

I think Poul Anderson sees the world as an unhappy place of much vulnerability and little splendor and that he ought to say so. One of the striking things about WORLD (and this is usual lately with this author) is that the book's evocations of joy, strength, and freedom fall very flat indeed. At one point Adzel reminisces about:

> the wide prairies of Zatlakh, earthquake hoofbeats, wind whooping off mountains ghost-blue above the great horizon! After dark, fires beneath a shaken aurora; the old songs, the old dances, the old kinship that runs deeper than blood itself.

David Falkayn has a similar passage:

> Hikes through the woods; swims in the surf . . . a slab of black bread and cheese, a bottle of some wine, shared one night with the dearest little tart . . .

In short, when asked to invoke the joy of life, the author carries on like the Scand of Minneapolis (to use William Atheling, Jr.'s phrase), while the book's descriptions of misery, failure, weakness, and pain, especially emotional pain, are considerably more convincing. One wrests from life,

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with great effort, a kind of bleak, minimal happiness—this is the unspoken message of the novel. There are no equals in this story and no love, although space adventure does not automatically preclude either (cf. Miss McCaffrey's romance). There is a conventional, stylized camaraderie between shipmates Falkayn, Adzel, and Chee: otherwise everything in this world is seen as a question of hierarchy, or perhaps it would be better to say a question of dominance—one of the horrors in the story is "Brainscrub," the taking over of one's very personality, and I think it no accident that such complete control of one person over another is spoken of as a rape. Nor is it a matter of chance that the heroine-victim, Thea (the only fully developed new character in the book, aside from the aliens), is seen as tragically vulnerable, vulnerable through her feelings, responsive, affectionate (not only to her master but to van Rijn *and* Falkayn *and* someone who is actually an employee), and far more interesting than the successful characters. If only the weak can feel, only the weak are real. Success anesthetizes and isolates.

As I said, I think this is Anderson the Somber trying to surface. He also had a hand in creating the horrifying sexual relationships in the novel: Chee Lan's open contempt for her lover; van Rijn and his whores (I really cannot remain polite about this); Falkayn's cheerful exploitation of his simp of a calendar girl, and hers of him, and—to top it off—Thea's tragic adoration of her raging alien master.

Not that I think the author should stop this. He should go the limit with it. Mr. Anderson has written in a fanzine column about what he called the "fascist" virtues and cited as one of them *an awareness of the tragic,* that is an awareness of irremediable failure. I wish he would let this virtue into his work in its real form, not in the form of grim glory or ersatz Byronism (common forms in heroic romance). He has done it before, as in "Kyrie," a very interesting short story published in one of the ORBIT collections. I also remember an adventure story in which the aliens (warlike, as usual) had beautiful, "muliebrile" (i.e., womanish) faces and strange aesthetic/erotic overtones, in which the Garden of War was a disturbing and disturbingly lovely place, a story far more interesting, both artistically and dramatically, than the usual space-opera set-up, however smoothly and professionally done and however spectacular the scenery (Mr. Anderson, as usual, is very good at this).

WORLD is a book made almost completely out of overstory: conscious, controlled, craftsmanlike,

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economical, ultimately irritating. I wish Mr. Anderson would stop controlling things so hard, would allow more breathing space for the understory, and let us see the results.

Brian W. Aldiss's REPORT ON PROBABILITY A (Doubleday, $4.50) is a Robbe-Grillet novel with Harold Pinter conversations that has somehow bemused Doubleday into printing it as science fiction. Part One is entitled "G Who Waits" and the last two lines of the book are "She waited" and "He waited." In between *you* wait. There is an epigraph from Goethe which sums up the novel, "Do not, I beg you, look for anything behind phenomena. They are themselves their own lesson." REPORT is a false-narrative, a book full of narrative cues that raise expectations only to thwart them. The prose is purposely meandering, sometimes funny ("A pigeon called X"). There are hints of a mystery that remains unresolved, one hundred and ninety pages of clear, beautifully written prose which slowly builds up to a perfectly controlled, low-keyed lyricism, and a great deal of repetition. Most of the book deals with the objects in and around a certain house and the quiddity thereof; the following is typical:

> Below the door was a stone step. This stone step had two features, one permanent, one temporary. The permanent feature stood on the right, the temporary feature stood on the left. The permanent feature was a shoe scraper of ornamental ironwork, the two ends of which curved upwards like dragons' heads; through the telescope's circle of vision, it was impossible to determine if they were intended to represent dragons' heads.
>
> —p. 76

I admire everything about the novel except its length. Matter organized in the lyrical, not the narrative, mode cannot be sustained for this long. REPORT would have made a brilliant novelette, but as a novel it is sheer self-indulgence. I had to work very hard to get through it at all and would on no account read it again.

Ray Bradbury does everything wrong. Anne McCaffrey can sing better; Poul Anderson can think him under the table; and compared with Brian Aldiss, he is as a little child. To him old people are merely children, in fact *everybody* is a child; he prefers imitative magic to science (which he does not understand); his morality is purely conventional (when it exists at all); his sentiment slops over into sentimentality; he repeats himself inexcusably; he makes art and public figures into idols; and there is no writer I despise more when I measure my mind against his, as George Bernard Shaw once said of Shakespeare.

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Mr. Bradbury has put out a new collection of stories, I SING THE BODY ELECTRIC (Knopf, $6.95). It is third-rate Bradbury, mostly. It is silly. It totally perverts the quotation from Whitman which it uses in its title. It is very good. Much has been made of Bradbury's lyricism, but no one (I think) has stressed the extraordinary *economy* of his style. He presents almost everything either in lyrical catalogue or dramatically, and while the lyrical catalogues sometimes fall flat, the dramatic dialogue hardly ever does. This gives his work tremendous immediate presence; "Show, don't tell," might be the frontispiece for any of his books. Or "Do many things *simultaneously*," (which is the real secret). Near the end of "The Kilimanjaro Device" the narrator says:

> I had the car up to ninety.
> We both yelled like boys.
> After that I didn't know anything.

The one thing Mr. Bradbury has going for him as content is an extremely fine understanding of a certain kind of childish or childlike emotion—the girl who was afraid to swing on a swing after her mother died because she knew it might break, in "The Kilimanjaro Device" the narrator's careful avoidance of Hemingway's name, the ancient lady who is selfishly delighted that her long-dead fiancé is really dead. And who else would talk of the summer air as "the summer swoons"?

In the book are two science-fiction stories, both refugees from THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES (as it were), a sprinkling of realistic stories with the smell, if not the content, of fantasy, a very bad poem, three very funny, charming and slick Irish stories, an uncharacteristically realistic story about incest, a gorgeous paean to beautiful, ageless Mother ("The Electric Grandma"), and several previously un-reprinted fantasies: "The Women", "Tomorrow's Child" (the blue pyramid baby), "The Tombling Day", and "Downwind from Gettysburg." Bradbury-haters will insist that these stories, like all his others, are about nothing. The truth is that his voice varies little and there *is* little in his stories—hence the effect of something spun gleaming out of nothing. Art can exist without encyclopedic knowledge, sophisticated morality, philosophy, political thought, scientific opinion, reflection, breadth, variety, and a lot of other good things. What else can I say? Mr. Bradbury strikes me as a writer on the same level as Poe, the kind of writer people will still be reading, still downgrading, still praising a century from now. Damon Knight's IN SEARCH OF WONDER (Advent Press, Chicago, 1967) says all I want to say and says it better. See chapter 10, friends.

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Still vibrating gently from the effects of the electric book, I quote Auden:

> Time that is intolerant
> Of the brave and innocent,
> And indifferent in a week
> To a beautiful physique,
> Worships language and forgives
> Everyone by whom it lives . . .

Doubters please note the exact meaning of that last line.

—JOANNA RUSS

## VENTURE Science Fiction

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The May issue of Venture (on sale now) features HIJACK, a new novel by **Edward Wellen.** It is the suspenseful story of what happens when information about an impending holocaust leaks down from the highest echelons of government to the leaders of the Mafia. Also, short stories by **Greg Benford** and others; book reviews by **Ron Goulart.**

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If you've missed any back issues of Venture, the following are available at 60¢ a copy, plus 15¢ per order for postage and handling: August 1969 (THE LEAGUE OF GREY-EYED WOMEN, by **Julius Fast**), November 1969 (PLAGUE SHIP by **Harry Harrison**), February 1970 (THE STAR TREASURE by **Keith Laumer**), May 1970 (HIJACK by **Edward Wellen**). Send your order to Mercury Press, Box 271, Rockville Centre, N. Y. 11571.

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*The exploration of space is romantic, not only in the sense of being adventurous, but also because it is, like romantic love, a lonely and irresistible dream. This story is about a boy with such a dream.*

# STARLIGHT SHINING THROUGH HER EYES

by Neil Shapiro

BACK THEN, IN THAT JULY that was both so usual and unusual, everyone's attention was centered not on the stars but on the Moon. So we'll be reaching for Alpha Centauri early next year; I wouldn't know where to look to find it in the sky. But I had seen the Moon, and we were going there. I think I would have given my life to trade places with that Armstrong fellow. I still would, but now, of course, I don't have much life left to offer.

My nephew was staying with me that night they walked across that "magnificent desolation." It was during the summer, so he didn't have school the next day. That's not how they work it now, but there was less to learn back then. I think he was twelve years old, maybe thirteen; it doesn't matter. But he shared the Dream. Not like other kids his age; not like the kids today.

That night meant something special to him, as it did to me. I remember, a week or so before they launched the moonship, I went out to pick up the morning mail, and he and another boy were sitting together on the lawn. They didn't notice me, the way kids do when they're deep in conversation with one another.

I had never seen him angry before; he had always been a quiet boy. He had never been one to lose his temper over a small thing; he was quite mature for his age. But he was shouting then and his fists were clenched.

"It's not stupid!" he was saying. "It's not! It's the biggest thing that's ever happened."



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"It's the biggest waste of money," the other boy replied just as loudly. "It's just dumb is all."

I recognized the other boy then. He was the son of our local newspaper editor. I had read one of his father's editorials that day which had talked about how the money for NASA could have been better put to use fighting poverty. It appeared that the son shared the father's views and was trying to convert Steve. He wasn't having a lot of luck at it.

Luckily another boy came over and they started on something else. But I felt quite proud of Steve. Like I say, he had the Dream.

I had a visit from him the next day. He looked worried over something and I figured it was the argument. I let him in and settled him down with a glass of soda, then waited for him to tell me about it.

He looked up at me and his eyes were locked on mine in a way that nearly frightened me. He didn't look his age right then. I knew it had to be more than just the argument I had overheard.

"Could a person live on the Moon?" he asked.

I almost laughed, but I didn't. I saw he really seemed to need an answer.

"You know they can't," I told him, "at least not without help. There's no atmosphere or water up there. Nothing at all." I would have thought he was playing around with me; he had known things like the distance to Saturn and the names of Jupiter's moons since he had been eight. I *would* have thought that—except for the way he looked at me when he asked.

"But if they had spacesuits it would be all right?" he asked, frowning. "If they had extra food and oxygen they'd be OK, wouldn't they? Nothing bad would happen to them?"

I thought he was worried about the astronauts then, and I wondered what old wives' tales he had been listening to. He did look frightened.

"Sure," I said, "they'll be fine. The suits the astronauts will be wearing will protect them totally." But he wasn't having any of it. If anything, he looked worse.

"I guess so," he said and his eyes gazed down at the floor. I heard him mumble to himself in a low tone, a whisper. "It's so far. It'll be OK, it has to."

After a while he was smiling again. I invited him to come over and watch the astronaut's Moonwalk with me.

We walked back to his house together. It was late, my fault for losing track of the time. His mother, Paula, sent him immediately up to bed, and I spent a few minutes talking with her. It was my brother's bowling night, so he wasn't around. I didn't like

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talking to Paula. She's a wonderful person, but she reminded me too much of Rachel. Rachel being my late wife. Yet they were quite different. Paula was the type of woman who was more interested in the PTA and the latest beauty aids than in life.

She was telling me of how she had been worried the last few weeks.

"It's Steve," she said, "the way he's been acting. He goes out every night, for hours. When I ask him where he's been, he tells me he's been out Moon-gazing of all things. Moon-gazing!" She made the word sound as if it shouldn't be used in public. "I don't know what's happening to him these days. He's been so quiet, more so than usual."

"Don't worry. There's nothing wrong with him, it's just the times." I laughed. "As far as that goes, I've been out myself Moon-gazing the past couple nights."

"Maybe I should forbid Steve to see you," she said, but she was smiling. "You're where he gets it from. But I don't suppose it will do him any real harm. When is this Moonwalk?"

If anyone else had asked me that, I would have assumed they were kidding, but not Paula. If there had been anyone that didn't know, it was her.

"Tomorrow night," I told her, "all night, but the walk would be only a few hours of the schedule."

She agreed it would be all right for Steve to come over as long as I made sure he got some amount of sleep. We talked for about an hour then on the sort of things that two people who don't really know each other talk about. If she hadn't resembled Rachel, I probably would have stayed away from her as much as possible. Then again, perhaps I would have liked her better had it not been for her appearance.

The night rolled around and Steve showed up right after supper. He seemed quieter than usual, and I couldn't help wondering if maybe Paula had been right. For a while I was unsure whether or not I should have drummed the Dream into the kid as hard as I had. But I realized that was nonsense; an adult can't influence a child that way. If anything, he would have taken the opposite viewpoint just to rebel. No, the Dream was Steve's as much as it was mine. It was something we shared.

We didn't talk much, just sat down in front of the TV, as so many other thousands were doing to watch man getting ready to take that giant step. The Eagle separated from Columbia and began its lunar descent. I looked over at Steve and he was literally on the edge of his seat—but, so was I.

Finally Tranquillity Base put its first call to Houston, and then, in

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awed silence, we watched Armstrong and Aldrin as they walked among the rocks and craters. After that we sat through the suspense of redocking and waited for word that the astronauts had returned from the far side of the Moon. Belatedly then, I remembered my promise to Steve's mother and sent him off to get some rest. I didn't expect him to be able to sleep after all that, but I figured I would let him toss and turn for a half hour or so and then allow him back out to watch the rest.

So I was a bit surprised after I noticed an hour and three quarters had gone by since Steve went up to the guest room. I decided it would be a good idea to check up on him.

He was moaning in his sleep. Not stifled nightmare sobs but deep, throat-racking convulsions. He had thrown all the covers off the bed and was squirming about like a man in the grips of a high fever.

I woke him and the next thing I knew the boy was crying on my shoulder.

"It's lonely," he sobbed, "so alone. Nothing to talk with, only the shiny bright things and the lights, just to listen to the hum and the silence, the silence . . ." He sounded very nearly hysterical; I remember thinking that he must have had one godawful nightmare.

"It's all right, I'm here," I whispered. "You're not alone."

"Not me," he said, still crying, "not me. Her. She's all alone and her parents are dead. Two years and she's been so scared. She thought someone had found her, but the strange ship went away and left her, and it was bad for her, and she was more frightened than ever. But now she said she's found me and won't be as lonely again. But she wants to go home; she's still all alone."

"Wake up, Steve. It's all over now. It was only a dream, wasn't it? Only a dream, Steve." In a few minutes his breathing became slow and regular, and soon he was asleep again.

I forgot about the incident until a week later. He came over early in the morning.

"What's up?" I asked. "No one else around?"

Then I took a good look at him. He had on that same frightened expression again.

"It wasn't a dream," he said. "I don't know what to do, but I've got to talk to someone about it."

We sat down at the kitchen table, and for a minute I thought he was going to get right up and leave. He wouldn't meet my eyes and was fidgeting around so. It seemed obvious that he was having second thoughts.

"Tell me about it," I said.

He looked up at me and shrugged his shoulders.

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"There's a girl. She lives in a small metal ship around the area of the Sea of Tranquillity." He looked into my eyes to see if he could detect any laughter there. But I guess there wasn't any—I didn't know how to react—so he continued.

"She's alone now. Her parents died in the crash."

"No one lives on the Moon," I told him and hated how condescending I sounded. "You know it's impossible to actually live there. There's no people there."

"I told you," he said impatiently, "her parents died in a crash. They were coming from somewhere else, but they had trouble and their ship crashed on the Moon. They died but she was still alive. There was food and air, but she's all alone."

"And how do you know this?" I asked, still thinking he was playing a game with me.

"She told me. That night."

"How could she have told you if she's on the Moon and you're down here?" I laughed then but stopped when I saw how it affected him. He looked as if I had struck him.

"I don't know," he said, "but she spoke to me, and she's been speaking to me every night since then, in my dreams when I'm asleep."

"Steve," I said as gently as I could, "maybe you've been thinking about the past few days too often. Sometimes a nightmare can seem very real, but you're not scared when you wake up are you, at least not for long? It's the same with good dreams, Steve; you mustn't believe them; they're not real."

I was surprised to hear myself giving him such typical advice, but when I thought about what I had said, I realized it was true. Dreams never last, not even those you have while you're awake.

"I told her I'd help her," he said, "and I thought maybe you'd help me think of a way. But you don't believe me." He didn't sound mad or even disappointed. He just said it, like he had been expecting he might.

"I wouldn't tell your mother about this," I said. "She might worry. We wouldn't want her to do that, would we?"

"No," he said, "she wouldn't believe me either. But it is lonely."

Later that night I was out in back looking up at the Moon and thinking of Steve and his fantasy. It was, well, a romantic idea. Have you ever really thought on just how lonely all that cratered grayness could be? I did that night, and I did a quite foolish thing. I actually tried to make my own mind a blank, drowsy and sleepy, to see if that girl would speak to me. But all I could hear was the sound of the neighbor's sprinkler and I went back in the house to sleep. I don't remember any dream I might have had.

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I didn't see Steve often after that night. I guess he had finally mentioned all this to his mother, and Paula wasn't the type to shrug anything like that off, not if it concerned her son. I heard that she even went so far as sending the kid to some psychologist for a few months. I felt sorry for him; it didn't seem fair that a boy his age wasn't even allowed an imagination.

I guess it was Paula who kept him away from me, probably considered me to be a bad influence on him. Can't say that she might not have been right, at least, as she saw it.

I moved out of town soon after that. There were too many places that held too many memories there for me. I thought I'd go out and make a new life for myself. But, you know, I wasn't running *to* anything. I think maybe I was looking for a dream myself, but dreams are hard things to come by. I had missed one and used the other up a long time ago.

So when I read in the papers about him six months ago, I almost didn't recognize his photograph. I hadn't realized how long it had been. But it was Steve, wearing the uniform and braid.

Lieutenant Steven L. Lewison, United States Air Force, Division of Space Exploration.

The story was about his then upcoming mission. As you'll remember, it was the Air Force's Project Wellspring, which was being billed as the first major step toward setting up a permanent and self-sufficient lunar colony. The mission preceding his had gathered data which pointed to the fact that there was water two miles under the surface of the Sea of Tranquillity. There wasn't much there, and what was there was locked up in rock. But with new recycling methods there wouldn't have to be a huge amount. If there was water there in actuality, any small amount, man would receive his first green light to start thinking seriously on what it would be really like to live out under the stars.

I think I was happier than I had been in years. Not only had Steve kept our Dream, not only had he been living it, but he would be helping to guide it to becoming a reality. And somehow, because of that, I felt that he had made *me* a part of that Dream.

When I heard they were going to have television coverage from the Moon of his mission, I was—well, pleased is too weak a word. It had been some time since a mission had received that much publicity. People got used to the lunar missions, and once they started the manned Mars probes, that's where the attention went. But television from the Martian surface had been deemed unfeasible, so it had been years since I had been able to watch the sight

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of a man walking across the surface of another world. The fact that not only would I again be able to view the silent, ethereal beauty of our sister world but that it would be Steve walking there was almost too much for me to believe.

There wasn't anything that could have kept me from the set as they disembarked from the ten-man LM to begin taking the first drill samples.

I watched the eight-man lunar excursion crew set up the awkward-looking laser drill and listened to the soft, confident voice of the newscaster explaining their movements to me. Silently and buoyantly, almost like a well-choreographed dance team, they moved on the surface of the Sea.

At one point then, Steve crossed into the field of view, close to the camera lens. When the sunlight glanced off his backpack and illuminated the reflective lettering of his name, I almost felt as if it was I standing there, facing the stars.

I thought back to that July night, and I wondered if he was thinking about it also. I remembered Armstrong and Aldrin, but I recalled a small boy also, and I wondered if Steve was still lonely, or whether the Dream had proved enough for him. The newspaper article had mentioned that he never had married.

Just then the newscaster called my attention back to the set. He was saying something about contacting Mission Control for an explanation. I didn't see anything going wrong or any overt signs of trouble. Then I noticed what I had missed during my reverie. All the astronauts were now in the camera's range. There were nine of them.

The announcer stated that either the LM Commander or the LM Radio Officer must have left the module, for some reason not in the flight plan. The other members of the crew were clustered around the ninth man. They were touching helmets as they talked. That in itself was unusual, that they weren't using their radios.

The newsman said that Mission Control was not commenting other than to say that the problem was not a serious one and the mission wouldn't have to be aborted. Still, the announcer pointed out, it was highly unusual that one of the two LM astronauts would join with the lunar surface men.

I watched as they continued talking and touching helmets for another few minutes which seemed quite long. Then two of them separated from the group and began walking back to the module. One of them was Steve, whom I had been watching since I had first identified his suit. The two of them passed by the camera lens, very close up, before they left the field of view.

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I don't know. I've been watching the papers carefully since the mission returned, and I've yet to read an official explanation of that episode.

But I think I know. I hope I do.

Like I say, they passed right by the camera, and I just got a glimpse of them. One was Steve, and the other was quite a bit shorter, and his suit was more reflective than the others'. I've done some checking since then, and both the LM Commander and Radio Officer are as tall as Steve.

You can't tell much from a spacesuit, or really see into one.

Maybe I'm just getting old, and my mind is playing tricks. But I don't really think so. I know what I saw.

The angle of the sunlight illuminated the other's helmet, and just for a second I could see her eyes. *Her* eyes.

He isn't lonely any more. He's got his Dream now, both of his dreams.

I could see the starlight shining through her eyes.

*Coming next month*

Next month's feature will be THE GOAT WITHOUT HORNS, part one of a two part novel by **Thomas Burnett Swann**, whose novelet, "The Manor of Roses," generated so many enthusiastic comments when it was published here in November 1966. The narrator of this new novel is a good-humored dolphin, which provides an offbeat and perfect counterpoint to the Gothic setting (a West Indian island with an atmosphere of mystery and supernatural terror, "an island where no birds sang"). In the words of the narrator, "the story is monstrous at times, as chilling as a confrontation with a tiger shark, as unlikely as an octopus or a narwhal, and the ending—well, you shall judge for yourselves."

**Isaac Asimov's** science essay next month is a provocative look at the background of astrology, and supports the belief that the characteristic quality of astrological lore is very much like the excrement of the male bovine. Dr. Asimov is, we believe, a capricorn. Our handy star guide describes capricorns as "party-poopers and wet blankets" which may give some consolation to astrologers; as for ourselves, we tossed all our charts in the fire after reading "The Stars In Their Courses," coming up in the August F&SF, on sale June 30.

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# THE QUARTER-ACRE ROUND TABLE

**article**

**by L. Sprague de Camp**

THE VISITOR TO THE UNITED Kingdom who goes by ship gets off at Southampton. If he motors thence to London, he can easily stop at Winchester, ten miles north of Southampton on Route 33. Originally built by William the Conqueror, Winchester Castle has often been altered, partly demolished, and rebuilt. Its surviving Great Hall is now used as a law court. On the wall at one end of this hall hangs a disk of oaken planks 18 feet in diameter, painted in a spoke pattern with twenty-four alternating bands of white (darkened to yellow by age) and green. Around its rim are painted the names of King Arthur and some of his more famous knights. This, the tourist is told with tongue in cheek, is the top of Arthur's original Table Round.

Nobody takes this attribution of the Winchester table seriously today. It is considered no older than the twelfth century. The paint goes back to 1520, when young King Henry VIII had it painted in Tudor colors to show Emperor Charles V when the solemn Habsburg came to visit. So this Round Table is a fake antique, but so old that it has become a valued antiquity in its own right.

The legends credit Arthur with seating 150 knights at his Table Round. Calculations show that such a table needs must be at least 125 feet in diameter. Such a table would have an area of about 12,300 square feet, or a little over a quarter of an acre. In the fourteenth century, under the spell of the Arthurian legends, Edward III of England and Philip VI of France actually began Round Tables of these dimensions. Evidently they found that such tables would be most impractical pieces of furniture—or perhaps their architects balked at erecting halls with such a large unobstructed interior space. In any case, these kings soon abandoned their table projects.

Almost every Anglophone in the world has heard of King Arthur and his Knights of the Table Round. Hundreds of stories, poems, and plays have been written about them; many motion pic-



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tures (like the recent *Camelot*) have been based upon them. An immense literature of speculation and criticism exists about them. Men are still named Arthur, Lancelot, and Percival after them. But few could tell you when Arthur lived, or even if he ever did.

Patching together the many inconsistent legends, we have this tale: In the early fifth century, after the Romans withdrew from Britain, the native Celtic chieftains set themselves up as kings. Barbarians invaded Britain from all sides, King Vortigern invited in the Saxons, under their chiefs Hengist and Horsa, to protect the Britons against other invaders. Strife soon arose between Britons and Saxons, and Vortigern began a tower to which he hoped to flee. Every night the masonry was swallowed up, until Vortigern's wizards told him to find a child without a father, sacrifice it, and sprinkle the foundations with its blood.

At Carmarthen, the king's messengers found a boy, Merlin Ambrosius, the son of a Welsh princess and a spirit. At court, Merlin demanded that Vortigern's wizards tell what was under the foundation. When they could not, Merlin explained that if they dug, they would discover two stones which, when broken open, would be found to contain a pair of dragons. This was done. The dragons awoke and fought, and the white dragon chased the red dragon out of sight.

Then two Celtic chiefs, Aurelius (or Aurelianus) Ambrosius and his brother Uther Pendragon, invaded Britain from Brittany. They slew Vortigern and hired Merlin, now an adult wizard, as their adviser. After Aurelius died and Uther succeeded him as king, Uther used one of Merlin's magical spells to beget a child on Igerna, the wife of a rebellious vassal. Uther wedded Igerna after her husband was slain in battle. After Uther's death, the child Arthur—now a stripling—attended a meeting of lords in London and proved his right to the throne by pulling a sword out of a stone.

Arthur hired Merlin and married the British princess Guinevere. With his knights he defeated the Scots, the Irish, the other British kings, and a Roman emperor. After his Roman war, he seems to have been too busy with administrative duties for knight-errantry. Most of the other tales tell of Gawain, Lancelot, and other knights of his retinue. Merlin fell in love with Nimuë (or Vivien), a lady of Arthur's court. She, however, had no use for elderly eggheads. To escape his lustful importunities, she imprisoned him by a magical spell under a rock.

At last a young kinsman of Arthur, Modred (or Mordred), rebelled against the "stainless king." In the battle of Camlann, most of

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the surviving knights of the Round Table perished, as did Modred. Arthur received a ghastly head wound and either died or was carried away in a boat by mysterious women to the fairy island of Avalon, whence he will some day return.

That is a rough outline; variations are countless. Thus, names like "Guinevere" are spelled in a dozen or more ways (*e.g.* Jennifer, Gwenhwyfar, Vanora, Gonore, Wander, etc.) In some versions the infant Arthur, instead of being the son of Uther and Igerna, is cast ashore at Tintagel Castle and is rescued by Merlin. Tintagel Head is a rocky cape, which juts out from the northern coast of Cornwall. The ruins of the castle rise on the narrow saddle joining the cape to the mainland. The sea has undermined the cliffs on either side, so that most of the castle is no more. Some rough walls of slabs of slate set in mortar survive at either end of the saddle. On the landward side stand the remains of the keep, of more substantial masonry.

Despite the hordes of tourists, Tintagel is a site of wildly romantic beauty. The rolling Cornish plateau, covered with emerald grass and splotched with purple patches of heather, ends in a cliff, over which a stream, Valentine's Brook, tumbles in a graceful waterfall. Along the beach, huge sea caves yawn at the foot of the cliffs; while high overhead, the ruined castle thrusts jagged walls blackly against the cloudy sky. If your imagination is strong enough, you can hear—over the sigh of the surf, the mutter of the falls, and the squeal of the gulls—the clang of armor, the blare of trumpets, and the neigh of knightly steeds.

The locals exploit their Arthurian associations by such establishments as Merlin's Tea Room and Sir Gareth's Petrol. The truth is less picturesque. Tintagel Castle was built in the thirteenth century by Reginald, Earl of Cornwall, on the foundations of an ancient Celtic monastery, whose ruins can still be seen. What then is the historical basis, if any, for the Arthurian legends?

In the sixth century a Breton monk, Gildas, wrote in bad Latin a sermon called *The Destruction and Conquest of Britain*. When not denouncing the sexual morals of British kings, Gildas summarizes the events of the previous century. *Selon* Gildas, the British king Guthrigern invited in the Saxons to fight other barbarians, but the Saxons turned on their employer and wasted the land. From Gildas' vague references to time, the Saxons arrived about the year 449. At last the Britons

> . . . took arms under the conduct of Ambrosius Aurelianus, a modest man, who of all the Roman nation was then in the confusion of this

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troubled period by chance left alive . . . and now his progeny in these our days, although shamefully degenerated from the worthiness of their ancestors, provoke to battle their cruel conquerors, and by the goodness of our Lord obtain the victory.

After this, sometimes our countrymen, sometimes the enemy, won the field, to the end that our Lord might in this land try after his accustomed manner these his Israelites, whether they loved him or not, until the year of the siege of Badon Hill, when took place also the last almost, though not the least slaughter of our cruel foes . . .

From Gildas' vague indications, the battle of Badon Hill took place about 455. After a half century of varying fortunes, the Britons won another victory at Badon Hill about 500. Nobody knows, though many have guessed, where Badon Hill stood. Gildas does not mention Hengist, Horsa, Arthur, Merlin, Guinevere, or Camelot.

In the eighth century, the English monk Bede (or Baeda) penned a history of the Church of England. He told how "King Vurtigern" brought in the Saxons:

> The first captains of the strangers are said to have been two brothers, Hengist and Horsa, of the which, Horsa being slain in battle with the Britons was buried in the east part of Kent, where his tomb bearing his name is yet to show.

Then Bede quoted Gildas verbatim about the recovery of the Britons under Ambrosius Aurelianus and their overthrow of the Saxons at Badon Hill.

Around 800, Nennius wrote a *History of the Britons*, which draws on Gildas but which also introduces several legendary elements. According to Nennius, Britain was first settled by Brutus, a grandson of Aeneas, the Trojan hero. Nennius mentions "King Ambrosius" but credits the victories of Ambrosius Aurelianus over the Saxons to Vortigern's son Vortimer and to St. Germanus, who routed the paynims by prayers and hymns alone. He tells the story of the crumbling tower. Vortigern's messengers find a boy named Ambrosius, who reveals an underground pool containing a pair of prophetic serpents.

Later, Saxon pressure waxed. "Then Arthur fought against them in these days, with the kings of the Britons, but he himself was the commander-in-chief." Nennius lists twelve battles, of which "The twelfth was the battle of Mount Badon, in which in one day 940 men fell at one onset of Arthur; and nobody overthrew them but he himself alone, and he stood out as the victor in all battles."

This is the first known mention of Arthur. The next is in the *Annales Cambriae*, or Welsh Annals, about 995:

> Year [518]. The battle of Ba-

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don, wherein Arthur carried the cross of Our Lord Jesus Christ for three days and three nights on his shoulder, and the Britons were victors.

Year [539]. The battle of Camlann, wherein Arthur and Medraut perished; and there was death in Britain and Ireland.

Medraut is our old friend Modred. Since he occurs in no older surviving source, we may suppose that the *Annales* got him from another document, now lost. The same goes for Camlann, location unknown. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, compiled about the same time, tell of Hengist, Horsa, and their successors but do not name any British leaders.

Gildas, Bede, and Nennius leave much to be desired as historians, being much more interested in the affairs of the next world than in those of this. They give far more space to Biblical prophecies, denunciations of heresy, and the adventures of St. Germanus than to the rise and fall of mundane kingdoms. Nennius in particular is such a mass of miracles and anachronisms that it is hard to take him seriously. But the documents discussed are the only primary sources we have.

There are many scholarly opinions about the source of the tales of Arthur. Some, like the late Lord Raglan, hold that the story is practically all pure fiction. Perhaps Ambrosius Aurelianus lived, but Nennius' "King Ambrosius," the prophetic boy Ambrose, and Arthur are fictitious characters on whom some of the deeds of the real Aurelian Ambrose have been foisted, exaggerated, and embellished with romantic and miraculous details. Characters in the cycle are traced back to various Celtic deities and heroes: Arthur from the god Artur, or Artaius; Gawain from the Irish Cuchulainn, and so forth.

Others derive Arthur from the family of a Roman officer, Lucius Artorius Castus. Castus is known from inscriptions to have served in Britain in the second century, to have led an expedition against rebels in Armorica (Brittany), to have risen to *praefectus* or brigadier, and at last to have retired to his native Dalmatia.

The third class of opinion is that of most scholars, who think that a real Arthur did fight the Saxons around 500, even though he may have later been credited with the deeds of mythical heroes and the attributes of gods. There must, they say, have been a British victory about 500, or the Saxons would have conquered Britain sooner than they did. The Britons must have had a leader, and there is no reason why this leader should not have been named Arthur. The name could have been either Celtic or from the Roman Artorius.

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Like Ambrosius Aurelianus, Arthur was not a king at the time of his great battle. He was, instead, a *dux bellorum,* a war leader or commander-in-chief, chosen by the jealous, bickering Celtic kinglets in preference to letting one of their own number boss the rest. Possibly Ambrosius, or Arthur, or both seized a throne after their victories. Some scholars infer that Arthur seized the throne of Cornwall from the family of Modred; that after Arthur and Modred fell at Camlann, Arthur's son Constantine kept the throne; and that Constantine's murder of two princes, for which Gildas denounced the Cornish king, was in fact (as Geoffrey of Monmouth asserts) the murder of Modred's sons.

For a detailed chronicle of the fall of Britain, covering the years 343 to 582, see Edward Foord: *The Last Age of Roman Britain* (London: Geo. Harrap & Co., 1925). Most of Foord's events are, however, conjectural. Unless some unlikely manuscript, letter, or inscription turns up, telling of the state of Britain around 500, we shall probably never know which, if any, of these speculations is right.

The nearest thing to confirmation of the Arthurian legends is Tristram's tombstone. In the legend—well known because Wagner made an opera of it—Tristram is the count of Lyonnesse, a land west of Cornwall, which like Atlantis was said to have sunk beneath the sea. He is a vassal of his uncle, King Mark of Cornwall. After many heroic deeds, Tristram falls in love with his uncle's fiancée, the Irish princess Isolt, whom he is escorting to Mark's court. After various twists and turns of plot, Tristram dies of a wound sustained in fighting in Brittany, and Isolt dies of a broken heart.

A mile and a half from the southern coast of Cornwall, near Fowey, stands a weathered seven-foot stone pillar. This shaft has been set up on a plinth at the crossing of roads A3802 and B3269. On the south side, a set of irregular and barely discernible letters make the following phrase, in half-illiterate Latin with several letters backwards or upside down:

DRVSTANS HIC IACIT
CVNOMORI FILIVS

or, "Here lies Drustans, son of Cunomorus."

Drustans is a form of Tristram or Tristan. From the life of a Dark Age saint, we learn that there was a king of Cornwall named Marcus Quonomorius. Evidently this Quonomorius or Cunomorus was the real-life original of the Arthurian King Mark, while his son Drustans was the prototype of Mark's nephew Tristram. A couple of miles north of

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Drustans' gravestone, a set of circular ditches and ramparts, overgrown with trees and brush and called Castle Dôr, is thought to have been Cunomorus' capital of Lancien. Perhaps the real King Marcus and his son quarreled over a woman, but we shall probably never know the details. Maybe some of the other Arthurian figures are likewise based upon real persons, but there is no way to be sure.

After the Welsh Annals, the Arthurian story soars off into faërie on the wings of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* (*c.* 1150). Geoffrey added the name "Merlin" to Nennius' "Ambrosius" (the prophetic boy and later wizard, not the general or king). He took materials from English chronicles, French romances, Greek myths, Jewish legends, Welsh traditions, Irish myths, and peasant fairy tales. Then he stirred them all together with a lacing of his own lively imagination. Thus the old Celtic sea god Lêr or Llyr became "King Lear," whom Shakespeare borrowed. Geoffrey sent Arthur to the Continent to defeat and slay a nonexistent Roman potentate, Lucius Hiberius, despite the assistance the kings of Egypt, Babylon, and other far places lent the Romans.

For a while, many took Geoffrey's work seriously as history, until the fourteenth-century historian Higden asked how it was that the Roman, Saxon, and French historians knew nothing of their peoples' being conquered by Arthur?

During the High Middle Ages, a huge mass of Arthurian romances—mostly French—were composed. The Arthurian cycle took its present form in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Malory was a country gentleman of Warwickshire and also a rascal and ruffian who spent much of his life in jail for assaulting and robbing his neighbors and raping their wives. In the 1460s, while doing time for one of these offenses, he lightened the tedium of prison by combining several French versions of the Arthurian story and translating the result into English. In 1485, fourteen years after the terrible Sir Thomas's death, Caxton, the first printer in England, published the work.

Writers have continued to exploit the Arthurian themes right down to the present. Tennyson composed a cycle of eloquent Arthurian poems, *The Idylls of the King*. In accordance with the ideals of Tennyson's time, however, the stories have been toned down and cleaned up. No more do knights, in a fit of pique, smite off their ladies' heads. No Victorian gentleman like Tennyson would have thought of such a thing, al-

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beit a real medieval knight, often a pretty ruffianly character, might have done it. Where the earlier Arthur had the usual royal retinue of mistresses, Tennyson's Arthur, learning of Guenevere's infidelity, bleats: "I was ever virgin save for thee!"—a state as likely in a real sixth-century brigand-king as one of the miracles from the lives of the saints of that time.

Later, Mark Twain burlesqued chivalric romance in *A Connecticut Yankee at King Arthur's Court* (1889). Twentieth-century writers like John Erskine and T. H. White have written Arthurian tales to entertain or to ride their hobbies. Whereas Twain used the legends to attack the Church and medieval romanticism, White employed them to defend the medieval world and assail the present one. (Of the many quasi-historical Arthurian novels of recent decades, my favorite is Rosemary Sutcliff's magnificent *Sword at Sunset,* which I think far outranks the rest. It tells what, in the light of present knowledge, *might* really have happened.)

I need hardly argue that the additions by Malory and other romancers are fictions. The site of Camelot is unknown; Malory said it was at Winchester, but others locate it as plausibly in Cornwall, Somerset, or Wales. The romancers portray fifth-century Britain as rife with dukes and counts, pages and squires, centuries before the feudal system took form. Arthur keeps a body of knights 600 years before knighthood was invented. Statues, paintings, and movies show knights clattering around in steel-plate armor 800 years before such armor was worn.

True, the Arthurian legends have some historical basis. There were probably a real Ambrosius Aurelianus, a real Hengist and Horsa, and a real King Constantine of Cornwall. There may even have been a real Arthur (or Artorius) who commanded the Britons at Mount Badon in the early 500s. The question, however, cannot be settled with the evidence we have.

Once Nennius began to add legendary details to it, the Arthurian story attracted more and more fictional anecdotes and episodes, as a magnet draws iron filings. In time, the few facts were almost lost in the fiction. So the Arthurian romances of Malory and Tennyson have as much to do with history as would a story in which Napoleon, with the help of Santa Claus, crossed the Delaware to beat the Japanese at the Battle of New Orleans, invented the automobile, and married Queen Victoria.

In fine, Arthurian Britain is not a real world. It is a province of the continent of Imagination. Realizing this, we can enjoy these lovely legends just as we can any other masterpiece of storytelling.

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*Robert Silverberg (winner of a Nebula award for best short story of 1969, "Passengers") here offers a story about a dolphin who has really put himself out for us humans and who has a complaint. John Lilly, in his book,* THE MIND OF THE DOLPHIN, *asks: "Can sexual activities be used for communication across the interspecies barrier? On the delphinic side, probably yes." On the human side? Well, you've come a long way, baby, but that far . . . ?*

# ISHMAEL IN LOVE

## *by Robert Silverberg*

CALL ME ISHMAEL. ALL HUMAN beings who know me do. My own kind does not make use of the unit-structural designation ("name") to distinguish individuals, but this is the name the humans gave to me, and it will do. I was named by Miss Lisabeth Calkins, for whom I feel protective-chivalrous-sexual emotions ("love"). Throughout my narrative it is understood that the designation "Ishmael" refers only to myself.

I am a member of an intelligent aquatic mammalian nonprimate nonhuman species, *Tursiops truncatus*, a bottle-nosed dolphin. I am eleven years old, which is to say that I am fully mature in all respects. My weight is 175 kg and my total length is 2.9 meters. I am employed at Gerard-Worzel Seawater Recovery Station, St. Croix, Virgin Islands, in a maintenance capacity, having commenced there on your date of August 14, 1994. To my own species I am sexually desirable and also highly regarded for my mental development. I have a large vocabulary. I communicate well with members of *H. sapiens*. I have considerable mechanical ability, as you can see by my success in switching on the electronic-acoustic device through which I am dictating this memoir.

I am a lonely mammalian organism who has committed acts of heroism on behalf of your species and wishes only the reward of a more intimate relationship ("love") with Miss Lisabeth Calkins. I beseech compassionate members of *H. sapiens* to speak



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favorably of me to her. I am loyal, trustworthy, reliable, devoted, and extremely intelligent. I would endeavor to give her stimulating companionship and emotional fulfillment ("happiness") in all respects within my power.

Permit me to explain the pertinent circumstances.

*Category 1: My Employment.* Gerard-Worzel Seawater Recovery Station occupies a prominent position on the north shore of the island of St. Croix, in the West Indies. It operates on the atmospheric-condensation principle. All this I know from Miss Calkins ("Lisabeth"), who has described its workings to me in great detail. The purpose of our installation is to recover some of the fresh water, estimated at 200 million gallons per day, carried as vapor in the lower hundred meters of air sweeping over each kilometer of the windward side of the island.

A pipe .9 meter in diameter takes in cold seawater at depths of up to 900 meters and carries it approximately 2 kilometers to our station. The pipe delivers some 30 million gallons of water a day at a temperature of 5 degrees C. This is pumped toward our condenser, which intercepts approximately 1 billion cubic meters of warm tropical air each day. This air has a temperature of 25 degrees C. and a relative humidity of 70 to 80 percent. Upon exposure to the cold seawater in the condenser, the air cools to 10 degrees C. and reaches a humidity of 100 per cent, permitting us to extract approximately 16 gallons of water per cubic meter of air. This salt-free ("fresh") water is delivered to the main water system of the island, for St. Croix is deficient in a natural supply of water suitable for consumption by human beings. It is frequently said by government officials who visit our installation on various ceremonial occasions that without our plant the great industrial expansion of St. Croix would have been wholly impossible.

For reasons of economy we operate in conjunction with an aquicultural enterprise ("the fish farm") that puts our wastes to work. Once our seawater has been pumped through the condenser, it must be discarded; however, because it originates in a low-level ocean area, its content of dissolved phosphates and nitrates is 1500% greater than at the surface. This nutrient-rich water is pumped from our condenser into an adjoining circular lagoon of natural origin ("the coral corral") which is stocked with fish. In such an enhanced environment the fish are highly productive, and the yield of food is great enough to offset the costs of operating our pumps.

(Misguided human beings sometimes question the morality of

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using dolphins to help maintain fish farms. They believe it is degrading to compel us to produce fellow aquatic creatures to be eaten by man. May I simply point out, first, that none of us works here under compulsion, and second, that my species sees nothing immoral about feeding on aquatic creatures. We eat fish ourselves.)

My role in the functioning of the Gerard-Worzel Seawater Recovery Station is an important one. I ("Ishmael") serve as Foreman of the Intake Maintenance Squad. I lead nine members of my species. Our assignment is to monitor the intake valves of the main seawater pipe. These valves frequently become fouled through the presence on them of low-phylum organisms such as starfish or algae, hampering the efficiency of the installation. Our task is to descend at periodic intervals and clear the obstruction. Normally this can be achieved without the need for manipulative organs ("fingers") with which we are unfortunately not equipped.

(Certain individuals among you have objected that it is improper to make use of dolphins in the labor force when members of *H. sapiens* are out of work. The intelligent reply to this is that, first, we are designed by evolution to function superbly underwater without special breathing equipment, and second, that only a highly skilled human being could perform our function, and such human beings are themselves in short supply in the labor force.)

I have held my post for two years and four months. In that time there has been no significant interruption of intake capacity of the valves I maintain.

As compensation for my work ("salary") I receive an ample supply of food. One could hire a mere shark for such pay, of course, but above and beyond my daily pails of fish I also receive such intangibles as the companionship of human beings and the opportunity to develop my latent intelligence through access to reference spools, vocabulary expanders, and various training devices. As you can see, I have made the most of my opportunities.

*Category 2: Miss Lisabeth Calkins.*

Her dossier is on file here. I have had access to it through the spool-reader mounted at the edge of the dolphin exercise tank. By spoken instruction I can bring into view anything in the station files, although I doubt that it was anticipated by anyone that a dolphin should want to read the personnel dossiers.

She is twenty-seven years old. Thus she is of the same generation as my genetic predecessors ("parents"). However, I do not share the prevailing cultural taboo of many *H. sapiens* against emotional

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relationships with older women. Besides, after compensating for differences in species, it will be seen that Miss Lisabeth and I are of the same age. She reached sexual maturity approximately half her lifetime ago. So did I.

(I must admit that she is considered slightly past the optimum age at which human females take a permanent mate. I assume she does not engage in the practice of temporary mating, since her dossier shows no indication that she has reproduced. It is possible that humans do not necessarily produce offspring at each yearly mating, or even that matings take place at random, unpredictable times not related to the reproductive process at all. This seems strange and somehow perverse to me, yet I infer from some data I have seen that it may be the case. There is little information on human mating habits in the material accessible to me. I must learn more.)

Lisabeth, as I allow myself privately to call her, stands 1.8 meters tall (humans do not measure themselves by "length") and weighs 52 kg. Her hair is golden ("blonde") and is worn long. Her skin, though darkened by exposure to the sun, is quite fair. The irises of her eyes are blue. From my conversations with humans I have learned that she is considered quite beautiful. From words I have overheard while at surface level I realize that most males at the station feel intense sexual desires toward her. I regard her as beautiful also, inasmuch as I am capable of responding to human beauty. (I think I am.) I am not sure if I feel actual sexual desire for Lisabeth; more likely what troubles me is a generalized longing for her presence and her closeness, which I translate into sexual terms simply as a means of making it comprehensible to me.

Beyond doubt she does not have the traits I normally seek in a mate (prominent beak, sleek fins). Any attempt at our making love in the anatomical sense would certainly result in pain or injury to her. That is not my wish. The physical traits that make her so desirable to the males of her species (highly developed milk glands, shining hair, delicate features, long hind limbs or "legs", and so forth) have no particular importance to me, and in some instances actually have a negative value. As in the case of the two milk glands in her pectoral region, which jut forward from her body in such a fashion that they must surely slow her when she swims. This is poor design, and I am incapable of finding poor design beautiful in any way. Evidently Lisabeth regrets the size and placement of those glands herself, since she is careful to conceal them at all times by a narrow covering. The others at the station,

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who are all males and therefore have only rudimentary milk glands that in no way destroy the flow lines of their bodies, leave them bare.

What, then, is the cause of my attraction for Lisabeth?

It arises out of the need I feel for her companionship. I believe that she understands me as no member of my own species does. Hence I will be happier in her company than away from her. This impression dates from our earliest meeting. Lisabeth, who is a specialist in human-cetacean relations, came to St. Croix four months ago, and I was requested to bring my maintenance group to the surface to be introduced to her. I leaped high for a good view and saw instantly that she was of a finer sort than the humans I already knew; her body was more delicate, looking at once fragile and powerful, and her gracefulness was a welcome change from the thick awkwardness of the human males I knew. Nor was she covered with the coarse body hair that my kind finds so distressing. (I did not at first know that Lisabeth's difference from the others at the station was the result of her being female. I had never seen a human female before. But I quickly learned.)

I came forward, made contact with the acoustic transmitter, and said, "I am the Foreman of the Intake Maintenance Squad. I have the unit-structural designation TT-66."

"Don't you have a name?" she asked.

"Meaning of term, name?"

"Your—your unit-structural designation—but not just TT-66. I mean, that's no good at all. For example, my name's Lisabeth Calkins. And I—" She shook her head and looked at the plant supervisor. "Don't these workers have *names*?"

The supervisor did not see why dolphins should have names. Lisabeth did—she was greatly concerned about it—and since she now was in charge of liaison with us, she gave us names on the spot. Thus I was dubbed Ishmael. It was, she told me, the name of a man who had gone to sea, had many wonderful experiences, and put them all down in a story-spool that every cultured person played. I have since had access to Ishmael's story—that *other* Ishmael—and I agree that it is remarkable. For a human being, he had unusual insight into the ways of whales, who are, however, stupid creatures for whom I have little respect. I am proud to carry Ishmael's name.

After she had named us, Lisabeth leaped into the sea and swam with us. I must tell you that most of us feel a sort of contempt for you humans because you are such poor swimmers. Perhaps it is a mark of my above-normal in-

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telligence or greater compassion that I have no such scorn in me. I admire you for the zeal and energy you give to swimming, and you are quite good at it, considering all your handicaps. As I remind my people, you manage far more ably in the water than we would on land. Anyway, Lisabeth swam well, by human standards, and we tolerantly adjusted our pace to hers. We frolicked in the water a while. Then she seized my dorsal fin and said, "Take me for a ride, Ishmael!"

I tremble now to recollect the contact of her body with mine. She sat astride me, her legs gripping my body tightly, and off I sped at close to full velocity, soaring at surface level. Her laughter told of her delight as I launched myself again and again through the air. It was a purely physical display in which I made no use of my extraordinary mental capacity; I was, if you will, simply showing off my dolphinhood. Lisabeth's response was ecstatic. Even when I plunged, taking her so deep she might have feared harm from the pressure, she kept her grip and showed no alarm. When we breached the surface again, she cried out in joy.

Through sheer animality I had made my first impact on her. I knew human beings well enough to be able to interpret her flushed, exhilarated expression as I returned her to shore. My challenge now was to expose her to my higher traits—to show her that even among dolphins I was unusually swift to learn, unusually capable of comprehending the universe.

I was already then in love with her.

During the weeks that followed we had many conversations. I am not flattering myself when I tell you that she quickly realized how extraordinary I am. My vocabulary, which was already large when she came to the station, grew rapidly under the stimulus of Lisabeth's presence. I learned from her; she gave me access to spools no dolphin was thought likely to wish to play; I developed insights into my environment that astonished even myself. In short order I reached my present peak of attainment. I think you will agree that I can express myself more eloquently than most human beings. I trust that the computer doing the printout on this memoir will not betray me by inserting inappropriate punctuation or deviating from the proper spellings of the words whose sounds I utter.

My love for Lisabeth deepened and grew more rich. I learned the meaning of jealousy for the first time when I saw her running arm in arm along the beach with Dr. Madison, the power-plant man. I knew anger when I overheard the lewd and vulgar remarks of the human males as Lisabeth walked

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by. My fascination with her led me to explore many avenues of human experience; I did not dare talk of such things with her, but from other personnel at the base who sometimes talked with me, I learned certain aspects of the phenomenon humans call "love." I also obtained explanations of the vulgar words spoken by males here behind her back: most of them pertained to a wish to mate with Lisabeth (apparently on a temporary basis), but there were also highly favorable descriptions of her milk glands (why are humans so aggressively mammalian?) and even of the rounded area in back, just above the place where her body divides into the two hind limbs. I confess that that region fascinates me also. It seems so *alien* for one's body to split like that in the middle!

I never explicitly stated my feelings toward Lisabeth. I tried to lead her slowly toward an understanding that I loved her. Once she came overtly to that awareness, I thought, we might begin to plan some sort of future for ourselves together.

What a fool I was!

*Category 3: The Conspiracy.*

A male voice said, "How in hell are you going to bribe a dolphin?"

A different voice, more cultured, replied, "Leave it to me."

"What do you give him? Ten cans of sardines?"

"This one's special. Peculiar, even. He's scholarly. We can get to him."

They did not know that I could hear them. I was drifting near the surface in my rest tank, between shifts. Our hearing is acute, and I was well within auditory range. I sensed at once that something was amiss, but I kept my position, pretending I knew nothing.

"Ishmael!" one man called out. "Is that you, Ishmael?"

I rose to the surface and came to the edge of the tank. Three male humans stood there. One was a technician at the station; the other two I had never seen before, and they wore body covering from their feet to their throats, marking them at once as strangers here. The technician I despised, for he was one of the ones who had made vulgar remarks about Lisabeth's milk glands.

He said, "Look at him, gentlemen. Worn out in his prime! A victim of human exploitation!" To me he said, "Ishmael, these gentlemen come from the League for the Prevention of Cruelty to Intelligent Species. You know about that?"

"No," I said.

"They're trying to put an end to dolphin exploitation. The criminal use of our planet's only other truly intelligent species in slave labor. They want to help you."

"I am no slave. I receive compensation for my work."

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"A few stinking fish!" said the fully dressed man to the left of the technician. "They exploit you, Ishmael! They give you dangerous, dirty work and don't pay you worth a damn!"

His companion said, "It has to stop. We want to serve notice to the world that the age of enslaved dolphins is over. Help us, Ishmael. Help us help you!"

I need not say that I was hostile to their purported purposes. A more literal-minded dolphin than I might well have said so at once, and spoiled their plot. But I shrewdly said, "What do you want me to do?"

"Foul the intakes," said the technician quickly.

Despite myself I snorted in anger and surprise. "Betray a sacred trust? How can I?"

"It's for your own sake, Ishmael. Here's how it works: you and your crew will plug up the intakes, and the water plant will stop working. The whole island will panic. Human maintenance crews will go down to see what's what, but as soon as they clear the valves, you go back and foul them again. Emergency water supplies will have to be rushed to St. Croix. It'll focus public attention on the fact that this island is dependent on dolphin labor—underpaid, overworked dolphin labor! During the crisis we'll step forward to tell the world your story. We'll get every human being to cry out in outrage against the way you're being treated."

I did not say that I felt no outrage myself. Instead I cleverly replied, "There could be dangers in this for me."

"Nonsense!"

"They will ask me why I have not cleared the valves. It is my responsibility. There will be trouble."

For a while we debated the point. Then the technician said, "Look, Ishmael, we know there are a few risks. But we're willing to offer extra payment if you'll handle the job."

"Such as?"

"Spools. Anything you'd like to hear, we'll get for you. I know you've got literary interests. Plays, poetry, novels, all that sort of stuff. After hours we'll feed literature to you by the bushel, if you'll help us."

I had to admire their slickness. They knew exactly how to motivate me.

"It's a deal," I said.

"Just tell us what you'd like."

"Anything about love."

"*Love?*"

"Love. Man and woman. Bring me love poems. Bring me stories of famous lovers. Bring me descriptions of the sexual embrace. I must understand these things."

"He wants the *Kama Sutra*," said the one on the left.

"Then we bring him the *Kama Sutra*," said the one on the right.

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*Category 4: My Response to the Criminals.*

They did not actually bring me the *Kama Sutra.* But they brought me a good many other things, including one spool that quoted at length from the *Kama Sutra.* For several weeks I devoted myself intensively to a study of human love literature. There were maddening gaps in the texts, and I still lack real comprehension of much that goes on between man and woman. The joining of body to body does not puzzle me, but I am baffled by the dialectics of the chase, in which the male must be predatory and the woman must pretend to be out of season; I am mystified by the morality of temporary mating as distinct from permanent ("marriage"); I have no grasp of the intricate systems of taboos and prohibitions that humans have invented. This has been my one intellectual failure: at the end of my studies I knew little more of how to conduct myself with Lisabeth than I had before the conspirators had begun slipping me spools in secret.

Now they called on me to do my part.

Naturally I could not betray the station. I knew that these men were not the enlightened foes of dolphin exploitation that they claimed to be. For some private reason they wished the station shut down, that was all, and they had used their supposed sympathies with my species to win my cooperation. I do not feel exploited.

Was it improper of me to accept spools from them if I had no intention of aiding them? I doubt it. They wished to use me; instead I used them. Sometimes a superior species must exploit its inferiors to gain knowledge.

They came to me and asked me to foul the valves that evening. I said, "I am not certain what you actually wish me to do. Will you instruct me again?"

Cunningly I had switched on a recording device used by Lisabeth in her study sessions with the station dolphins. So they told me again about how fouling the valves would throw the island into panic and cast a spotlight on dolphin abuse. I questioned them repeatedly, drawing out details and also giving each man a chance to place his voiceprints on record. When proper incrimination had been achieved, I said, "Very well. On my next shift I'll do as you say."

"And the rest of your maintenance squad?"

"I'll order them to leave the valves untended for the sake of our species."

They left the station, looking quite satisfied with themselves. When they were gone, I beaked the switch that summoned Lisabeth. She came from her living quarters rapidly. I showed her the spool in the recording machine.

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"Play it," I said grandly. "And then notify the island police!"

*Category 5: The Reward of Heroism.*

The arrests were made. The three men had no concern with dolphin exploitation whatever. They were members of a disruptive group ("revolutionaries") attempting to delude a naive dolphin into helping them cause chaos on the island. Through my loyalty, courage, and intelligence I had thwarted them.

Afterward Lisabeth came to me at the rest tank and said, "You were wonderful, Ishmael. To play along with them like that, to make them record their own confession—marvelous! You're a wonder among dolphins, Ishmael."

I was in a transport of joy.

The moment had come. I blurted, "Lisabeth, I love you."

My words went booming around the walls of the tank as they burst from the speakers. Echoes amplified and modulated them into grotesque barking noises more worthy of some miserable moron of a seal. "Love you . . . love you . . . love you . . ."

"Why, Ishmael!"

"I can't tell you how much you mean to me. Come live with me and be my love. Lisabeth, Lisabeth, Lisabeth!"

Torrents of poetry broke from me. Gales of passionate rhetoric escaped my beak. I begged her to come down into the tank and let me embrace her. She laughed and said she wasn't dressed for swimming. It was true; she had just come from town after the arrests. I implored. I begged. She yielded. We were alone; she removed her garments and entered the tank; for an instant I looked upon her beauty bare. The sight left me shaken—those ugly, swinging milk glands normally so wisely concealed, the strips of sickly white skin where the sun had been unable to reach, that unexpected patch of additional body hair—but once she was in the water I forgot my love's imperfections and rushed toward her. "Love!" I cried. "Blessed love!" I wrapped my fins about her in what I imagined was the human embrace. "Lisabeth! Lisabeth!" We slid below the surface. For the first time in my life I knew true passion, the kind of which the poets sing, that overwhelms even the coldest mind. I crushed her to me. I was aware of her forelimb-ends ("fists") beating against my pectoral zone, and I took it at first for a sign that my passion was beng reciprocated; then it reached my love-hazed brain that she might be short of air. Hastily I surfaced. My darling Lisabeth, choking and gasping, sucked in breath and struggled to escape me. In shock I released her. She fled the tank and fell along its rim, ex-

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hausted, her pale body quivering. "Forgive me," I boomed. "I love you, Lisabeth! I saved the station out of love for you!" She managed to lift her lips as a sign that she did not feel anger for me (a "smile"). In a faint voice she said, "You almost drowned me, Ishmael!"

"I was carried away by my emotions. Come back into the tank. I'll be more gentle. I promise! To have you near me—"

"Oh, Ishmael! What are you saying?"

"I love you! I love you!"

I heard footsteps. The power-plant man, Dr. Madison, came running. Hastily Lisabeth cupped her hands over her milk glands and pulled her discarded garments over the lower half of her body. That pained me, for if she chose to hide such things from him, such ugly parts of herself, was that not an indication of her love for him?

"Are you all right, Liz?" he asked. "I heard yelling—"

"It's nothing, Jeff. Only Ishmael. He started hugging me in the tank. He's in love with me, Jeff, can you imagine? In *love* with me!"

They laughed together at the folly of the love-smitten dolphin.

Before dawn came I was far out to sea. I swam where dolphins swim, far from man and his things. Lisabeth's mocking laughter rang within me. She had not meant to be cruel. She who knows me better than anyone else had not been able to keep from laughing at my absurdity.

Nursing my wounds, I stayed at sea for several days, neglecting my duties at the station. Slowly, as the pain gave way to a dull ache, I headed back toward the island. In passing I met a female of my own kind. She was newly come into her season and offered herself to me, but I told her to follow me, and she did. Several times I was forced to warn off other males who wished to make use of her. I led her to the station, into the lagoon the dolphins use in their sport. A member of my crew came out to investigate—Mordred, it was—and I told him to summon Lisabeth and tell her I had returned.

Lisabeth appeared on the shore. She waved to me, smiled, called my name.

Before her eyes I frolicked with the female dolphin. We did the dance of mating; we broke the surface and lashed it with our flukes; we leaped, we soared, we bellowed.

Lisabeth watched us. And I prayed: *let her become jealous.*

I seized my companion and drew her to the depths and violently took her, and set her free to bear my child in some other place. I found Mordred again. "Tell Lisabeth," I instructed him,

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"that I have found another love, but that someday I may forgive her."

Mordred gave me a glassy look and swam to shore.

My tactic failed. Lisabeth sent word that I was welcome to come back to work and that she was sorry if she had offended me, but there was no hint of jealousy in her message. My soul has turned to rotting seaweed within me. Once more I clear the intake valves, like the good beast I am, I, Ishmael, who has read Keats and Donne. Lisabeth! Lisabeth! Can you feel my pain?

Tonight by darkness I have spoken my story. You who hear this, whoever you may be, aid a lonely organism, mammalian and aquatic, who desires more intimate contact with a female of a different species. Speak kindly of me to Lisabeth. Praise my intelligence, my loyalty, and my devotion.

Tell her I give her one more chance. I offer a unique and exciting experience. I will wait for her, tomorrow night, by the edge of the reef. Let her swim to me. Let her embrace poor, lonely Ishmael. Let her speak the words of love.

From the depths of my soul . . . from the depths . . . Lisabeth, the foolish beast bids you good night, in grunting tones of deepest love.

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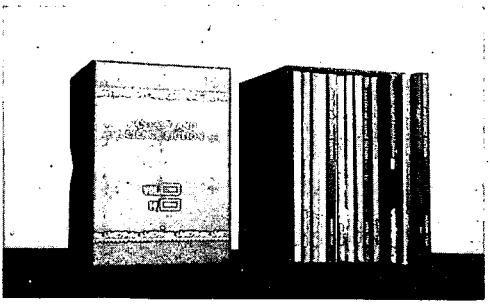

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*Since many short stories do not synopsize well, we do not ask writers to send queries before submitting. For instance, what editor would agree to read a story whose query ran something like this: "Dear Sir: I have a story about a playboy whose rich aunt decides to leave her fortune to a cat. So he gets hold of some fur, practices bounding and purring, sort of pretends he's a cat, see, and . . ." As we say, some stories don't synopsize well, but don't let that spoil your fun.*

# TOM CAT

***by Gary Jennings***

IT ISN'T THAT TOM WELCH has anything against work. One of his mottoes is "don't knock it till you try it," and work simply happens to be one of the things he's never tried. His rich Aunt Emma put him through the best schools and afterward settled on him an allowance that now enables him just *barely* to drone along with the Beautiful People of the Jet Set.

"But only in jet economy class, Aunt Emma," he complains, fidgeting about the drawing room of her Boston town house. "Just look at that dingy old Aston Martin of mine. Every other boy my age is driving a brand new Smetana-Moldau."

"Humph. How old are you now, young Thomas?"

"Forty-two, auntie."

"Shame on you. When your dear uncle was your age, he was forty-three."

"That's the dotty sort of answer I'm always getting," Tom laments to his friend Shelby Melancolli II, as they loll on the beach at Deauville.

"What did you say to that?" asks Shelby.

"What *could* I say? That I'll certainly be forty-three next year."

"Then you're plenty old enough," says his aunt, "to have learned to live within your allowance. I'm sure those Jet People of yours would understand."

"Jet *Set,* auntie. Beautiful People."

"Whatever they are. No, not another penny, young Thomas. If you spend it all now, there'll be



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nothing for you to inherit later."

"That's the dotty sort of answer I'm always getting," Tom grumbles to Shelby at Acapulco.

Shelby nods understandingly. "After all, it's not as if you'll be sponging off the old girl forever."

"Of course not," says Tom. "One of these days she'll die."

"And you'll inherit."

"I'm her nearest and dearest."

"Her only, I thought."

"Her only *and* her nearest and dearest. I do little things like reading aloud to her whenever I stop by. Since she turned ninety, her vision has gone quite dim."

"You're looking frightfully dissipated, young Thomas," says his aunt, peering narrowly.

"That's uncle's old moose head, auntie. I'm over here."

"Fidgeting about, as usual. Sit down and start reading. Jennings, bring us the latest literature."

"Yes, m'lady."

"I'll just settle here with my knitting. Very well, Thomas, you may begin."

"*Yowr!*"

"Aunt Emma, that's the cat you're knitting at."

"Oh, dear! My poor Puffpuss. Izzums hurt? Izzums angry?"

"Izzums gone, auntie, over the balustrade. That's your knitting you're fondling."

"Stop correcting your elders. Get on with the reading."

"Yes, Aunt Emma. Ahem. 'From what HIDDEN FOUNTAINS, you may ask, came the WISDOM of Amenhotep IV, Leonardo da Vinci, Francis Bacon? These illustrious Wise Men discovered and perfected certain *secret methods* of enhancing their MENTAL POWER. And those selfsame MYSTIC ARTS have been preserved from generation to generation, in the keeping of the Brotherhood of Rosicrucians . . .'" Tom pauses. "Rosicrucians, auntie? Have we finished with Inner Light Unfoldment already? Or was that Scientology last week?"

"Scientology," says Aunt Emma with a sniff, "is old hat. Too modern. The Rosicrucians make it clear that we must *plumb the past* for the source of TRUE KNOWLEDGE. My eyes are opened at last."

"Her eyes get opened about twice a month," says Tom to Shelby on Mykonos. "But still she holds conversations with the newel post."

"Aren't you afraid she'll really fall for one of these isms? Dotty old women often leave their fortunes to some swindling swami."

"Not Aunt Scrooge. She'd no more do that than leave everything to Puffpuss."

"Speaking of pussycats, here comes a girl you ought to meet. Alice, shake hands with Thos. Welch. Thos., let me make you acquainted with Alice Aforethought."

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Tom's eyes bulge. "My, you look nice," he breathes huskily.

"I *am* nice," says Alice.

"She *is* nice, Aunt Emma, and I am smitten," says Tom. "But she is upper crust and I am unworthy of her. The only reason she consorts with me is that I'm a curiosity—the first non-millionaire she's ever met. It's so humiliating when I can't even charter a quick flight to Les Halles for onion soup at midnight."

"For the forty-second time, young Thomas, I will not increase your allowance. Not a penny."

"You never take me anywhere," pouts Alice.

"But, Alice, how can I?" says Tom. "I mean to say, you're *there.* What I mean, if any other girl wanted to go someplace, *this* is where she'd want to go. You're at Juan-les-Pins, at the poshest of posh parties. Just look around you. There's Wallie and the Duke. And over there's Liz and Dick, and Grace and Rainier, and Meg and Tony. And yonder is Gore and Myron and Myra, and Brigitte and Whatsisname. And here come our host and hostess. Hello, Jackie. *Kalimera,* Ari."

"Hello, Alice and Tommy."

"*Kalimera*, Alice and Tommy."

"There, Alice. What more could a girl want?"

"You never take me anywhere."

"Have you thought of supplementing your allowance, old boy?" asks Shelby at Bimini.

"How?"

"A spot of work, perhaps. Some gentlemanly occupation. Just as a stopgap until Aunt Emma is one with the ages."

"Work, eh? Well . . ." Tom sighs and squares his shoulders. "Don't knock it till you try it, I've always said."

So Tom sends out a number of seductively worded letters, all beginning, "Dear Sir: I am a graduate of Harverd . . ." but they bring him not so much as an offer of a minor vice-presidency.

"You never take me anywhere," pouts Alice at Marbella.

"Darling, look—out in the bay—J. Paul's yacht. Let's go with him on a cruise around the world."

"I've been there."

"All right," says Tom with sudden resolve. "I'll take you somewhere you've never been. To the altar. Alice, will you be mine?"

"Marry you?" says Alice, perking up. "*Quelle nouvelle.* No boy's ever propositioned me that way before."

"Pro*posed* to you, Alice."

"I meant proposed. It's so quaint it's cute."

"Then you *will* be mine? Forsaking all others, cleaving only to one another, to have and to hold, for better or worse, in sickness and in health, for richer or poorer, that none shall put asunder, till death do us part?"

"I guess so."

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"Those three little words!" cries Tom in joy. "They've made me the happiest man alive. Oh, Alice! We'll be married immediately after the funeral."

"Funeral?" squeaks Alice. "You mean we have to wait for your Aunt Enema to die?"

"Aunt Emma, dearest."

"Well, I won't! I'll marry someone else."

"She'll marry someone else!" Tom bleats brokenly. He staggers into Aunt Emma's drawing room, one arm flung across his eyes. "I have come home to Boston to Beacon Hill to die."

"To die is but a small step for a man," says an unfamiliar voice. "Upward or downward on the great stepladder of To Be."

Tom yanks his arm from his eyes and stares at a small, bald, grease-brown man enveloped in a voluminous fur coat that hangs clear to his grease-brown shoes, worn without socks. He looks like a wienie walking around in its bun.

"Ah, Thomas," says Aunt Emma. "This is Sir Sri Jawaharlal Ghosh."

"Pleased to meet you, Sir Sri."

"A pleasure. Yiss."

"Not Sir Sri, Thomas," his aunt corrects him. "The more respectful address is Swami Ghosh."

"A swami? Great Scott!"

"No, dear. Swamis come from India."

"Yiss."

"All very interesting, auntie, indeed it is. But listen, I must tell you this. I love Alice Aforethought and she loves me. We want to get married and settle down."

"Settle down?" his aunt says absently.

"Our own little rose-covered yacht. The patter of little deck shoes and all that. We simply can't do it on my pittance."

"Not another pitty," says Aunt Emma. "I mean penny. Now, swami, you were saying?"

"I was speaking, Mrs. Madam, of your estimable cat, Pisspiss."

"Puffpuss."

"Yiss, yiss. With application of the mystic influences, as was teached to your humble servant by an ancient hermit lama in Tibet, this cat's future is limitless. *Om mani padme hum.*"

"Swami Ghosh, you have opened my eyes!" exults Aunt Emma. She turns and speaks to a floor lamp nearby. "Thomas, would you believe it? Puffpuss might someday be President of the United States."

"The cat?" says Shelby at Gstaad.

"Or a worm," says Tom. "If it lives an upstanding worm life it becomes, perhaps, a newt in its next incarnation. Then the newt, living and dying unsmirched, comes back as, oh, a wombat. And so on up the great stepladder of To Be until it culminates gloriously in, say, Spiro Agnew."

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"And Puffpuss is destined for similar eminence."

"All that's necessary is for Aunt Emma to endow the Ghosh Almighty Pagoda. The whole congregation will then sit around chanting—*Oh, Manny!* or however it goes—to help Puffpuss lead a more meaningful cat life and forge on to bigger things."

"I warned you. A swindling swami."

"Yiss. I mean yes. He's utterly repulsive."

"Resembles a wienie, I believe you said."

"Walking around in its bun. He wears this nasty, fuzzy coat flayed from some Himalayan creature. An abdominal something."

"Abominable."

"You said it. And if I don't work fast, he'll be fleecing me as well. I must act before auntie is mulcted. But how?"

"Have you thought of giving Aunt Emma a leg up on that great stepladder of To Be?"

"Hm. Well, I've nothing actually *against* murder, of course. Don't knock it, I always say, until you try it. But before I do anything drastic, I'll have one last talk with her."

"Do that. Maybe she'll say something to put you in a killing rage."

"Aunt Emma, why is the music room swarming with stout old ladies in floral hats?"

"The girls from my club, young Thomas. They've come to hear the swami lecture on the Ghosh Almighty philosophy. Ah, so good to see you, Contessa Francesca."

"That's your begonia centerpiece, auntie."

"Hush, Thomas. The swami is about to speak."

"*Om,* dearly beloveds, *mani padme hum.* We shall begin the service with the ritual singing of our hymn, the Monsoon Moon Song . . ."

Moodily, Tom retreats to the drawing room, where he sits watching Puffpuss perform an elaborate toilet, until finally the service is over and Aunt Emma returns on the arm of Swami Ghosh.

"I'm glad you're still here, young Thomas. I have something to say that concerns both you and the swami."

"Yes, Aunt Emma?" says Tom apprehensively.

"Yiss, Mrs. Madam?" says the swami expectantly.

"Swami, the girls have just joined me in subscribing handsomely to the endowment of the Ghosh Almighty Pagoda. Thomas, your already ample allowance will continue as long as you live. The remainder of my estate—all six billion dollars—I have decided to bequeath to Puffpuss."

"*Auntie!*"

"*Madam!*"

"He will need campaign funds.

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Puffpuss-for-President posters and such. Pins."

"But Mrs. Madam, that may be ages hence!"

"Precisely. Long after you and my nephew have ceased to need or want the money, it will still be intact for Puffpuss."

"But—but—in the meantimes, Mrs. Madam, the Almighty Pagoda would be a fitting repository for it. Yiss, and a fitting home for the future President, too, through all his interim incarnations. I bespeech you, dear Mrs. Madam, not to be hasty!"

"My mind is made up, dear swami. And not another word from you either, Thomas. Thomas? Where is that boy?"

He is in the study across the hall, at the telephone, frantically dictating cablegrams to both Shelby and Alice: COME AT ONCE. When he departs, by way of the foyer, he finds Jennings helping a few remaining clubwomen into their several minks and sables, and Tom's eye falls on one fur as yet unclaimed.

"Jennings," says Aunt Emma some time later, "what is all that hysterical shouting in the foyer?"

"It's Sir Sri; m'lady. It seems one of the guests must have walked off by mistake with his bun. I mean his coat."

In a hotel room not far away, Tom is busy with glue pot, shears and fur, crooning while he works, "Swa-mee . . . *how*-I-love-ya, *how*-I-love-ya . . . my-y-y dear old swami . . ."

Alice, arriving breathless at the hotel, pounds on Tom's door, finds it unlocked and bursts in.

"I came as fast as I—*eek!*"

"Meow."

"Tommy! What on earth has happened?"

"Call me Puffpuss, dear."

"Tommy, was it burglars? You're bound hand and foot."

"Just got tangled in this yarn while I was playing with it. Untie me, sweetest. And do call me Puffpuss."

"Yes, P—uh, dear. What *are* you up to?"

"Practicing. Make a lap, darling." He bounds into it, curls up and says, "Tell me honestly now, how does this sound for purring? *Futterfutterfutterfutter* . . ."

"You sound awful. You look awful! You're shedding all over me!" She leaps distractedly from the chair, spilling Tom off her lap.

"Notice that, Alice? Landed on my four feet."

"Oh, this is terrible. This is tragic."

"Well, it's not easy. Takes a lot of close observation, assiduous practice to be a cat. I think I've got pretty good at it."

"I don't like it when you lick under your leg like that."

"Don't knock it till—ah, hello, Shelby. Meow."

"Shelby! Thank God you've

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come! Tommy thinks he's a cat!"

"You must be mistaken, old boy."

"I'm a cat okay. Look at me."

"I am. You must be mistaken, old boy."

"And I'm not just any cat. I am a cat named Puffpuss, to whom my dotty Aunt Emma is about to bequeath six billion dollars."

"Six bil—Damned if it *isn't* Puffpuss. Remember him well. Seen him many a time at dotty Aunt Emma's. Alice, you've never met Puffpuss. This is Puffpuss."

"Of *course*. Puffpuss. Pwetty kitty, come to Awice. Awice pet you. Itchy kitchy kitchy."

"*Futterfutterfutterfutter* . . ."

"He's pleased," says Shelby. "He's purring. Exactly the way I remember Puffpuss purring. That's Puffpuss, all right."

"Now," says Tom, "I'm not," as he stands up and shucks off the disguise.

"Right. Now you're Tom. Explain things, Tom."

"Dotty Aunt Emma's having her lawyer in tomorrow. Before he gets there, I do. I simply drop the real cat out the window—to you, Alice; give him a good home, dear—and I take his place. Auntie will accept me unquestioningly."

"But there'll be other people," says Alice. "The lawyer and all."

"Nobody contradicts Aunt Emma. Besides, I'll have substantiation. Shelby, you'll be the vet."

"Check. I'll go now and start practicing my catside manner."

"Do. And you, Alice, practice catching cats."

"Thomas," says Aunt Emma, entering her drawing room just as Tom wheels around from the window. Outside there is a faint noise of "plump" and "oof!" in a girl's voice. "What are you doing up before noon?"

"Couldn't sleep, auntie. I was worried that someone ought to be watching over our future President."

"How touching. Where is he, then?"

"Saw him in the study a moment ago. I'll send him in."

Tom steps into the hall, steps into his disguise, calls out, "Here he comes now, auntie," and saunters back into the drawing room on all fours.

"Yes, there's my puzzums."

Tom fawns against the old lady's legs while she reaches down to scratch his back. Then he stretches out beside her rocking chair, futterfuttering contentedly.

"Jennings, I heard the front bell. Is that Lawyer Kalbfuss?"

"No, m'lady. It's Sir Sri."

"Yiss." The swami oozes in, now wearing only a rather dirty dhoti. "I came to bespeech you again—" His eyes widen. "Dear Mrs. Madam, what is that?"

Tom lays back his ears and whiskers.

"Do you mean Puffpuss?"

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"The cat? That is the cat? The same cat you had yesterday?"

"Of course. Do you suppose I change cats at whim?"

Tom bristles his fur and hisses.

"Puffpuss seems to have taken a slight dislike to you, Swami Ghosh," says Aunt Emma. She adds suspiciously, "You're not by any chance a Democrat?"

"Madam," says the swami, standing smally tall in his sockless shoes. "I am of the highest Indian caste. A Brahman."

"In Boston it's Brahmin."

"Something about this cat," says the swami, staring at Tom's fluffed-up fur, "*is* familiar. Yiss."

"If you came here just to addle me," says Aunt Emma, "my mind is made up."

"Surely so," says the swami hastily. "Only, dear Mrs. Madam, have we assured ourselfs that this cat has the *qualities* for the Presidentdom?"

"*You* assured *me*."

"*With* the proper guidings in the Ghosh Almighty principles. However, not yet having had that guidings, the cat appears phlegmatic. Has he ever, for instance, catched a mice? One would expect one's President—"

"Puffpuss is six years old. In human terms, that would be forty-two. You can hardly expect him to gambol like a kitten."

"Perhaps not, Mrs. Madam. But regard him. You have been rocking on his tail for five minutes, and he has not so much as—"

"Er—*yeowr!*" yelps Tom, coming suddenly alert and bounding away from the chair.

"He does sound a bit hoarse," says Aunt Emma worriedly.

Pausing only to glare tigerishly at the swami, Tom begins to gambol like a kitten. He pounces at the fringe of the rug, then bats at the tassels of a drapery.

"And now he seems quite frenetic. I wonder if he could be coming down with something. Thomas!"

Tom gambols out the door, stands up and sticks just his head back in. The swami jumps. "Yes, auntie?"

"Telephone Dr. Udderweiss to come and have a look at Puffpuss."

"Yes, auntie."

In the study, he dials Shelby and says, "Dr. Udderweiss, come at once. Oh, and meantime tell Alice to get me some mice."

"Aren't they feeding you, old boy?"

Tom gambols into the drawing room again, as Jennings and another gentleman arrive.

"Counselor Kalbfuss is here, m'lady."

The lawyer edges into the room, looking apprehensively at Tom gamboling behind him.

"Good morning, Kalbfuss. That's Puffpuss."

"That is the—er—heir? I

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thought, Emma, you said it was to be a cat."

"What does that look like? A canary?"

"Well, no."

"Meow."

"Bless my soul, it is a cat."

"Kalbfuss, it was you who *gave* me Puffpuss. To console me when my husband passed away."

"It was just a kitten then. I had no idea . . ."

Tom bounds into Aunt Emma's lap and begins playfully to undo her knitting.

"Puffpuss *has* been a great consolation to me. Now, in gratitude, I intend to provide for his future. Prepare the necessary papers, Kalbfuss. Jennings, you will witness my signature. Thomas, see who that is at the door. Get off my lap, Puffpuss, you're shedding. Thomas!"

"Just going, auntie," Tom calls back, as soon as he has gamboled out of the drawing room.

"From Miss Alice Aforethought," says a palsied, ancient messenger boy at the door. He hands Tom a gorgeously gift-wrapped Tiffany box.

"Why is this box squeaking?"

"Tiffany's finest first-water, flawless, blue-white mice, sir."

"Confound it, I wanted plain old gray house mice."

Haughty sniff. "Try Cartier's, sir."

Tom is fussing with various household fluids in the butler's pantry when the doorbell rings again.

"Emil Udderweiss, D.V.M.," says Shelby, wearing a monocle, a Van Dyke and a small round mirror perched on his forehead. "Why are you dyeing those mice?"

"Give me a minute to get upstairs, Shelby, and then you come."

Tom is again gamboling about the drawing room when Shelby sweeps grandly in and demands, "Is there a patient in the house?"

"Ah, Udderweiss," says Aunt Emma. "I called you to give a checkup—"

"How right you were. My superb medical intuition perceives that instantly. The poor dumb creature. Lost all its pelt, I see." Shelby strides to Swami Ghosh and lifts one of his eyelids. "Moribund. Terminal. Tragic." He picks up a telephone, dials swiftly and barks, "The wagon!"

"No, no, no," says Aunt Emma, as the swami backs terrified into a corner. "It was Puffpuss I wanted you to look at."

"To admire, you mean. Never saw a finer specimen of *Felis felis*. Just see how he gambols. Living all nine lives to the hilt."

"Do you really think so, doctor?"

"All cat, that cat. Observe, he's caught a mouse."

Tom drops it in the middle of the rug and looks proud.

"Odd," says the swami, still

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somewhat shaken but still unbowed. "This mice is wet. Something seems fishy here. Yiss."

"Fishy indeed!" scoffs Shelby. "*Mus domesticus.* All mouse, that mouse."

"Thank you, Udderweiss," says Aunt Emma. "I'm so relieved about Puffpuss. Kalbfuss, let's get on with the paperwork."

"A moment, doctor," says the swami spitefully, peering into Shelby's little black bag. "I see no shots record for this cat. Are all his immunities up to date?"

"Hm. You have a point. One can always do with a shot."

"Yiss."

"*Fitzrowr!*"

"Hold his head, please, counselor." Shelby strides to the sideboard and dollops brandy into a snifter. "Force his jaws, Jennings."

"*Fitzr*—ulp."

"Not those kind of shot!" rages the swami.

"Good for man or beast," says Shelby, taking one himself.

"Merciful heavens," says Lawyer Kalbfuss.

A siren sounds suddenly outside, and four burly men in white elbow into the room. "Isolation ward," says Shelby with a jerk of his head, and the four men bear the swami away kicking and screaming.

"Merciful heavens," says Aunt Emma.

"A shock, no doubt, madam. But thank Hippocrates you called me in time. A Himalayan form of hydrophobia, the abominable snowmania. You saw how he was foaming at the cat."

"Merciful heavens."

"*Futterfutterfutterfutter* . . . hic."

"You think it went well, then?" says Shelby some days later, at a secret meeting in the butler's pantry.

"Perfectly," says Tom. "The will is all signed, sealed and I am irrefutably recognized as Puffpuss. Kalbfuss had me put my pawprints on some of the papers."

"That's just what they made Swami Ghosh do."

"Who did?"

"The Bide-a-Wee Home & Clinic. He's up for adoption."

"We can't go on meeting like this, Tommy," says Alice, still later. "This fence hurts my—hurts me."

"I've told you, dear, auntie is a light sleeper. Whenever she wakes up she likes to look out and see me here serenading the moon. There she is at the window now. *Meowrrrooo,* moon."

"It's been months now, and we're no better off than before. It still looks like that old lady will outlive us all. We'll soon be too old to have kittens. I mean kids."

"We'll adopt Sir Sri."

"Be serious, Tommy!"

"Okay, we'll buy us a whole orphanage. We'll be rich, Alice!"

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"When? I don't intend to spend the best years of my life straddling a back fence."

"There's auntie again. *Meowrrrooo*, moon."

Another window rattles up somewhere. "Shut up, you infernal feline!"

Whiz.

Thunk.

"*Ow!*"

"Sorry, Alice, I think that shoe was meant for me."

"This is too much! I can't endure any more!"

"Alice!"

"Farewell forever, you—you—infernal feline!"

"Hell hath no fury," sighs Shelby, still later, at Tom's fence, "like a woman."

"You don't mean—?"

"Yes. Alice has blown your cover. She's in there now, returning Puffpuss to the bosom of your aunt. You can't go home again."

Lights begin going on in every window of the house. "Your Aunt Emma is so indignant that she's even disowning the real Puffpuss. She's leaving everything to Jennings."

"Ya-*hoooo!*" comes an exuberant cry from indoors.

"That was Jennings."

"Oh, well," says Tom. "Can't win 'em all."

"You don't seem adequately dashed. Six billion dollars done and gone. Sweet Alice been and bolted."

"The fact is, there's someone else."

"Come now, old boy. In that getup how could you even have *met* someone else?"

"Here. On this very fence."

"You can't mean—?" Shelby is speechless.

"She's Siamese. They do say that Orientals make the best wives. Her name is Ah Sin."

"I say, old boy, this is letting down the side."

"Here she comes now. Isn't she smashing?"

Shelby goggles, speechless.

"*Futterfutterfutterfutter . . .*"

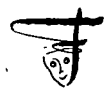
"*Futterfutterfutterfutter . . .*"

"But—but—old boy, how will you live? How will you support a family?"

"I'll become a cat burglar," Tom murmurs carelessly, as he and Ah Sin move off along the fence top, together into the moonset.

"Old boy!" calls Shelby, in one last appeal. "These mixed marriages never work!"

And back come Tom's last words, dim from the dark far distance. "Don't knock it till you try it . . ."



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*Dean R. Koontz, whose most recent book is* THE DARK SYMPHONY (*Lancer*), *returns with a suspenseful story about the first android, who is running from a society that had conceived him as a tool but now sees him as a menace, because he refuses to let men die.*

# THE MYSTERY OF HIS FLESH

***by Dean R. Koontz***

IT WAS TOO MUCH TO HOPE FOR, but we seemed to have lost them. We had jumped from Knoxville to Pierre, South Dakota, from that drab terminal to Bismark, North Dakota, and on to San Francisco. In the City of the Sun, we had walked unknown with our hands in our pockets and our faces open to the sky, feeling less like fugitives than we had any right to, grabbing a day to rest. At midnight, we had bought tickets and boarded the next pole-crossing flight that would take us over Alaska. As the high-altitude craft flashed over Northern California and into Oregon, I took Him into the bathroom and locked the door. "Take off your coat and shirt," I told Him.

"I want to see the wound."

"I tell you, it's hardly anything at all." He had been telling me that for a day and a half, stalling me. But I had seen the World Authority copper shoot in the Pierre terminal. I had seen the blood fountain from His shoulder when the pin had torn into Him. Him . . . Not much of a name. But what do you call the first android? Adam? No, too trite. I had a dog once that I had never called anything but Dog. That dog was *totally* doggy, everything a dog should be, the archetype of all canines. He could hold no other name but Dog. And our android, flawless as a wax apple, was the archetype, so it seemed, of Man. He: a fitting title.



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"You've been putting me off now for—" I tried to argue.

"Don't worry," He said, His eyes blue-white and penetrating. It had always been his eyes that upset the senators who came to investigate the project. Later, they would remember other peculiarities and begin to question those, but it always started with His eyes. Imagine the sky reflected blearily in a heavily frosted pane of milk glass. Cut out two circles of that rimed blue and paste them in two globes of veinless white marble. Those were His eyes. There was no denying them, no escaping: droplets of mercury mirroring the ocean.

"Strip anyway," I said. "I'm doctor here!"

He obeyed. He always obeyed. There had been just one incident when He had refused, and that had been the same incident that revealed that He was developing abilities far beyond any we had anticipated.

I had been with Him that day, working on analysis of His reflex patterns (which had just begun to show an extraordinary rapidity), when the explosion had rocked the research complex. I didn't think about Him or about leaving Him alone; I grabbed my bag and ran, following the intercom directions to the area of disaster. I had been working two hours in the smoking ruins, trying to do preliminary patchwork on the dying bodies while we waited for the ambulance to return from its many trips to the local hospital. When I saw the animated form of a man I had earlier left for dead, I thought I had finally flipped. Then I began to see others, six in all, men certainly dead only a short time before. He was doing it. *He.* I became aware of the military around. They were ordering Him to stop reviving people, but He would not listen. Finally, they shot Him with narcodarts and put Him on ice until they could decide what was to be done.

Under current social mores, it is perfectly correct and noble to keep someone from suffering and dying prematurely. But in a world of nine billion, it is taboo—and suicidal—to bring anyone back from the dead.

They examined his fingers and watched as He demonstrated His ability to reshape His hands into flesh scalpels, thin His fingers into three-molecule thickness knives to penetrate another man's skin. They were horrified by the possible applications. But they could not convey their horror to Him. He had been given a mind freer than any other man's mind. He held true to what he deduced as the highest values of existence. One of these was to prolong human life as long as possible, and as healthfully as possible. Since He refused to let men die when

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He could get into parts of their livers and kidneys and hearts where no human surgeon could go, delve into their alveoli and scrape out cancer cell by cancer cell, He was a menace to World Authority. We had given Him a superior mind, and He had begun to surpass Man in a speeded evolution of a physical and moral nature.

It was decided by the project directors to disassemble—that's the word the idiots used!—the first android, partly because of His ability to increase Man's lifespan (after scientists had worked so frantically to keep it down to eighty-five) and mostly because the military was frightened by a superhuman who could evolve Himself, who could adapt His body, given sufficient time, to the optimum efficiency. They saw Him as a potential threat, not as a tool by which men could learn and grow.

That night, I kidnaped Him.

Don't ask me why. If we had to explain ourselves, life would be one constant flow of words. I guess it had to do with seeing Him revive men I had left for dead. That shakes a physician. I couldn't let those marvelous hands be burned for modern witchcraft.

I went to the lab that night, woke Him, told Him the situation, and left with Him.

That was a week ago. We had been running ever since.

Fast.

He removed His shirt now and stood before me, a magnificent specimen, all muscle, no fat. He had developed a new tissue-building process, He told me, by which all unused food materials were made into a new sort of muscle fiber which dissolved as easily as fat when needed to produce energy, though the body did not have to suffer the burden of useless tissue at other times. The wound was high on His right shoulder, an inch or so deep and three to four inches long. It had stopped bleeding. No scab or clot. *He* had stopped it.

"It'll need to be stitched," I said.

"No. I'm completing new systems."

"So?"

"I'll be able to speed-heal myself in another half an hour."

I swallowed, let go of the wound. "I see."

He put His arm on my shoulder, and we had quite abruptly switched roles. He was the father image now, I the son. "I still need you, Jacob. I'll always need someone to talk to, someone who understands me."

"Well," I said, avoiding His eyes, "let's get back to the debarking hold."

We left the bathroom and walked the length of the main passenger compartment, expecting to be recognized, and through into

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the debarking chamber. The officer on duty was a slim man in his early thirties. He sat reading a low-quality papsheet and puffing on a cigarette. "We'll be disembarking at Cantwell, Alaska," I said.

He looked up and folded the papsheet. "Ticket?"

He looked us over thoroughly while I fumbled for the two pieces of yellow paper. I was afraid that somewhere in his simple brain, two synapses would flop open and he would connect us with the pictures he must have seen. Over the week He and I had been playing cat and mouse with World Authority, gaining time for Him to develop to the point where He wouldn't have to run, our pictures had had more than a few front-page splashes. Luckily, the debarking officer seemed the type to skip the news section and dwell on the gossips and comics. For the first time in my life, I thanked Heaven for anti-intellectualism.

"You're paid up clear into Roosha," he said, looking at the tickets.

"A last minute change of plans. Relatives in Cantwell."

He shrugged and carefullv entered the numbers of our stubs in the departure books. Here was a neat set of clerical footprints for the World Authority to follow when they crashed our newest pseudonyms—which they would most certainly do.

"That capsule at the end," he said. "We drop in—eleven minutes."

We moved down the line of egg-shaped, crimson globes that nested in the bays in the floor. The officer came after us, watched us climb down through the open hatch and strap in. "Let's see you grip the wheel," he snapped. We gripped. "That's better. Don't let go of the wheel until beam contact."

"We won't."

He shook his head. "I don't know. You people never seem to learn. Lots drop without gripping. Then when free fall surprises them, they get sick. And when the beam jolt comes! Brother!"

"We'll grip the wheel."

He nodded, hesitated as if there were something he wanted to say. Finally he shrugged and closed the hatch, locking us in. I knew he vaguely remembered seeing us before. I had come to recognize that look. Sooner or later, he would remember who we were. I only hoped it was not until we were out of Cantwell Port and on our way.

"Don't worry, Jacob," He said, flashing His chalk white teeth in a flawless smile, eating into me with ice eyes.

Suddenly lights flashed and buzzers bleeped.

We dropped . . .

Down . . .

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Dropping from a high-altitude passenger rocket is not uncommon. Thousands of capsules are discharged every day, millions in a year. When you have an overcrowded world with billions of people who want to move often and rapidly, you can't have a transportation system that stops at every station on the route. The next best thing is to encapsulate the people who want off at backwater places and shoot them out of the rocket's belly. They fall for a mile or two, then are caught by the control beam broadcast from the alerted receiving station and lowered gently into a receptor pod. But those first few seconds of free fall . . .

After what seemed like an overlong drop, we were gripped by a control beam. It settled us into a pod. An officer slid back the hatch, helped us out, checked our stubs, and we were on our way.

We came out of the service tunnels and into the main lobby of the Port building. I found the passenger service desk and inquired about a package I had mailed myself from San Francisco the day before. He asked for my stub, checked signatures, and handed over the two parcels. We each took one and moved outside to the taxi stalls.

It was snowing. The wind howled across the promenade and echoed like hungry wolves in the beams of the porch roof.

We went down steps into the auto-taxi docking area and found a four-seater in the line. The taxis were fairly busy with arrivals, and I realized we had been unlucky enough to arrive just before a scheduled rocket landing and pickup. I opened the back door of the taxi and put my box in, turned to take His. Just then, a taxi bulleted into the stall next to us and flung open its doors.

"Quick," I said, grabbing His box and sliding it onto the seat.

A tall, elegantly dressed man got out of the other taxi and pushed past us towards the stairs. He went up two steps and stopped as if he had just been knifed. He whirled, opened his mouth, and fumbled for a weapon beneath his bulky coat.

He was employed by World Authority in some capacity, for he would not otherwise have possessed a weapon. But I had worked for World Authority too. I drew my narcodart pistol and fired for his legs. He staggered, went down on his knees. Somehow, before he passed out, he got in a call for help.

I opened the front door of the cab just as a spatter of pins broke across the roof, inches from my face. I whirled and searched the stalls for the gunman.

"I saw a movement back there by that blue and yellow two-seater," He said. He had drawn His dart pistol too (one filched

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from the sports shop in San Francisco where we had bought the other things).

"Wait here," I said, lying on my stomach and slithering under the next taxi, working my way under the cars toward the one He had indicated.

Behind me, He stood and fired, drew an answering hail. That helped pinpoint our gunman. I moved around him, staying beneath the taxis as much as possible. A row behind him, I came out in the open and moved in on his rear. It was a Port Authority guard in uniform. I couldn't tell whether he recognized us as the first man had or whether he was just shooting because he had seen me take out the other fellow. Either way, I had to stop him. I stepped out into the open and aimed at his buttocks.

He heard me, turned in the last second.

I stuck him with a dozen pins. He toppled to his left, grasped at the taxi, slid to the pavement, and lay still, breathing softly.

I hurried back to Him. We would have to move fast now—damned fast! The place would be crawling with World Authority men when the elegant stranger woke. Kill him? Yes, but that was not the reason I kidnapped the android—not to kill. We climbed into our taxi, punched the codeboard for McKinley National Park, and held our breath until we were out of the parking area.

Snow pelted the windscreen, and wind moaned eerily along the sides of the teardrop craft.

We were in the clear.

For now, anyway.

We changed clothes as we rode until we were both decked out in the insulated suits, gloves, goggles, boots, and snowshoes (lashed on our backpacks) that had been in the parcels.

"How's the arm?" I asked Him.

"All healed," He grinned. "Just like I said it would be."

The auto-taxi glided to a halt before the gates to Mount McKinley National Park, the gray shape of the towering colossus a lighter dark against the night. I stuffed four dollar bills into the payment slot and punched random co-ordinates to send the taxi skittering around for the next half an hour or so. "That should do," I said. "Let's go."

The doors sprung open when we touched the release panels, and we clambered into the night, taking our bundles of old clothes with us. The car closed up, thrummed, then executed a swift turn and whizzed back the way we had come, its light receding and leaving us alone in the darkness.

We stuffed our old clothes back into a drainage culvert. "And now we climb the fence into the park," I said.

"Wait." He moved past me to

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the gate, taking off His gloves and putting His hands on the padlock. While I watched, the tip of His finger elongated, thinned to a wire, and snaked into the lock. A minute or two went by with the wind beating us like rubber sledge hammers. Then something clicked. He withdrew His hand, re-formed His fingers into more conventional shape, put on His gloves, and pushed the big gates inward.

"Very tricky," I said.

We moved inside, closing the gate and locking it again. "We'll follow the road a while," I said. "Not likely to meet anyone at this hour."

We began walking, goggles over our eyes and face masks pulled down to thwart the biting cold and the tremendous, razor-edged whip of the wind. The falling snow rapidly covered our footprints behind us. We had not gone more than half a mile when He pulled down His mask and said, "Tell me about this place where we're going."

I pulled down my mask, winced at the stinging air. "At the base of the mountain, they lease cabins to prominent, wealthy citizens. Harry Leech—*Doctor* Harry Leech—the old man who ran City General when I interned there, leases one on the second level. It's secluded. Nearest cabin is a mile away. He keeps it stocked with food and fuel."

"He doesn't mind our using it?" He asked.

"He doesn't have to know."

"And they won't find us?"

"How long do you need?"

He grimaced. His eyes, I saw, almost shined in the darkness like lightning bolts caught on the night horizon. "Three days should do it. Things are coming along faster than ever."

I had planned to stay at the cabin a few months, knowing Leech rarely came in the wintertime. But now that we had been spotted in Cantwell, our time would be severely cut short. Three days would be stretching it some. "Well," I said, "the first thing they're going to do is check the monorail and low-altitude air traffic records to see whether we transferred to some other system and left Cantwell. Then maybe the taxis. No, definitely the taxis. But they'll see the random trip ticket I punched and think we dropped out somewhere along its line to confuse them. They'll put off searching the park until last because it's so damnably big."

"I'm interested in the food," He said.

"What do you mean?"

"I hope there will be a lot of it. I'm going to need it to get energy for the changes I'm making in myself."

"Big changes?" I asked.

He grinned again. "Just wait, Jacob. Just wait."

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I pulled my mask back up and worked my jaw to unstiffen it. He didn't bother to replace His mask. The cold no longer bothered Him. He had adapted to it . . .

We left the road when we neared the fork that held the ranger station. I had only been here three times before, all three back when I had been an intern and Harry had given me the keys and wished me luck with whatever nurse had fallen for my limited charms and unlimited line. Admittedly, an unusual relationship between director and intern, but then Harry was the one who had gotten me interested in medicine, had raised me after my parents were killed. I wondered what Harry thought of his boy now. Then the brush grew denser, and there was no time for thinking about anything but breaking through into open country.

He moved ahead, breaking a path with His larger bulk. Thorn vines snagged our suits and held us up, but I was confident we could make the cabin by morning. In time, we came into the fields and stopped to rest. I checked the compass and looked at the map I had brought in my wallet. "Straight across the field," I said. "And we better break out the snowshoes."

Halfway across the field, we found the snowshoes necessary. The field dropped ten feet, forming a breaking point for the drift winds, and the rest of the broad flatland was buried in a good six feet of snow. We treaded carefully, despite the fact that the crust seemed everywhere thick enough to support us. We stayed ten feet apart to distribute our weight. A hundred yards from the woods, I felt the crust cracking under me. I panicked, was about to run, and remembered that would do me no good. But by the time I remembered, I had leaped a single step, smashed through the crust with force, and fell through snow over my head. I flailed, came close to suffocating, and broke through, looking up the hole I had made at the stars and falling snow. After a moment, His face appeared as He came to the rim of the broken crust.

"Don't you fall in too," I warned. "Any ideas on getting me out of here?"

"I'll dig a sloping path in to you and pack the snow as I come," He said. "It's the only way. I can't pull you out. That would bring me down with you."

"What are you going to dig with? We haven't any shovels."

He took off His gloves and jacket, oblivious to the cold. He held out His hands before Him, closed His eyes, and stood like a giant pine in the wind. I could see very little in the dim light, but I *could* see some transforma-

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tion was taking place in His hands. When He finally opened His eyes and set to work digging a sloping path in to me, I saw that the fingers had fused together. The palm had broadened and thinned until each arm ended in a flat scoop. With these, He quickly removed the crust from the snow twenty feet away and angled toward me, packing the snow in steps. Two hours later, we were both suited again and headed towards the woods once more.

When we reached the trees, I looked at His hands, but could find no sign of the previous transformation. "How much of your body can you—change when you want to?" I asked.

"Most of it," He said nonchalantly.

"Your face?"

"I'm working on that."

"When you control that, you can stop running."

"Even with a changed face, I would be recognized. It's everything about me that singles me out. I'm different."

It was true. He would always be an outcast. He was a supergenius who could no more pass for man than a man could pass for an ape. "But a change of face would gain you time to complete your evolution.

"Get me to the cabin," He said, gripping my shoulder in His mammoth hand, "and I will only need three days."

I put on my goggles and mask and read the compass. I pointed straight ahead. He took the lead again. As He walked, I noticed something new about Him. His hand, when He gripped my shoulder, had been enormous. Now I saw that He was enormous in every respect. An insulated suit meant to be bulky was strained to bursting with His huge body. His head seemed larger. His footprints were half again as large as mine.

It wasn't exactly the result of the wind or the cold, but I shivered.

Half an hour later, He stopped and squatted in a small clearing, wiping snowflakes from His face and looked about as if He were searching for something He had left behind on a previous trip through these same parts, though He had never been here before.

"How far to the cabin, Jacob?" It was the first time I had seen anxiety in Him; He was usually the pinnacle of patience.

"Well—" I took out the map, unfolded it, squinted to see in the gloom. "We're halfway through the woods. Then we have to cover a series of foothills, not rugged but steep, skirt this last copse, and we're there. Maybe two hours yet."

"That's much too long."

"It's the shortest way. I checked it several times in Frisco, remember. This always measured the best route."

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He didn't answer.

I sat down next to Him. The snow was falling harder now. "What is it?" I asked at length.

"I need food. I can't wait until we reach the cabin."

"For the—changes?"

"Yes, Jacob. I need food for energy—and to create large quantities of muscle fiber."

"How do you propose to get anything out here?"

He grinned. "You may not like this, but it is necessary."

He took off his gloves and knelt on the earth. He pressed His fingers against the ground, brushing away the snow. Almost as if they were melting, His hands ran into the dirt. The frozen ground cracked and spattered up as His lengthening fingers probed it. Several minutes later, He smiled and withdrew His hands, His fingers growing normal again. "I found two of them," He said mysteriously. "Over there."

I followed Him to a jumble of rotting logs. Effortlessly, He hefted the logs aside, revealing a burrow. He reached into it, and His arm grew long, not just His fingers. Abruptly, there was a squealing and thrashing from inside the burrow. He drew His arm back, a snow rabbit clutched in His fist. It had been strangled. A moment later, He had done the same to a second rabbit. "Too risky for fire—no time anyway. You might not like this."

"I'm a doctor. Used to blood, you know."

He lifted the first rabbit in His left hand while He thinned His right fingers and slid the tiny tips into the game, loosening the hide from the inside. The animal peeled like a banana. When both were skinned, He set to devouring them. He took large bites of greasy flesh, blood dribbling down his chin, until He had consumed all but bones and fur. "Okay," He said, standing and wiping the gore from His cheeks and lips. "Time to go."

My stomach flipped like a dying animal. I turned and led the way this time, trying to sort the conflicting emotions out of my mind. He was the greatest boon to Mankind in centuries, was He not? I should discount His energetic consumption of the rabbits—blood, guts, and all. Shouldn't I? But there was one thing troubling me: yes, perhaps He was benevolent in His previous stage when I had kidnaped Him—but that did not necessarily mean He would look kindly upon Mankind in one of His later stages, after he had *changed* . . .

Damn! I was acting like some superstitious old ninny. This wasn't a retelling of the hoary Frankenstein tale! My artificial human was not going to turn on me like a senseless brute and bash my head in. I shook my head and tried to dispel any more such

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thoughts. I knew they were unhealthy.

Thirty-five minutes later, we came out of the wood at the edge of the foothills. We had taken off our snowshoes when we had entered the last wood, now we unstrapped them and put them on again. I made a mental note to be especially careful if we encountered any drifts. We couldn't afford another two-hour delay while He shoveled me out. It would be dawn before we reached the cabin now, and I didn't want to stay out in daylight any longer than was absolutely necessary. We moved off across the barren slopes, and we had just crested the rise when the sound came to us.

"What is it?" He asked, taking my arm and stopping me.

I peeled off my mask and waited. It came again. "Wolves, I said. "A pack of wolves."

We stood in the middle of the slope, nothing behind which we might hide, nothing at all to do but wait and hope they passed us by. But my scalp tightened and cold chills swept up my spine when I considered the unlikelihood of that. A wolf has exceedingly acute senses. And with the wind blowing our scent in the direction of the guttural, melancholy howls, there was almost no chance at all that we would escape detection.

"I've read little about wolves," He said. "But they are vicious when they're hunting—am I right?"

"Too right," I told Him, drawing my pin gun and wishing, now that there were beasts instead of men, that I had something more lethal than narcodarts. "They must have caught the odor of blood from the rabbits. If that's the case, they've been searching for some time now, and they're bound to be near mad with excitement."

The first wolf loped into sight, a scout of the main pack. He came over the brow of the next hill and stood looking at us across the little valley that separated us. His eyes were hot coals, gleaming between the beads of the snow curtain that draped the night. He raised his neck to howl.

I leveled my gun and fired a burst of pins that caught him in the throat. He gagged, shook his head, toppled over and slept. But the sound of his comrades indicated little gap between the scout and the body of their force. The other wolves crested the ridge and stopped like a line of Indians confronting the cavalry in a cheap Western movie. They moved around uncertainly, taking turns sniffing the scout. When they realized he was not dead but sleeping, some of their bravura was restored. A few threw their heads back and howled at the low sky. The echo beat around the foothills, carried to the wall at the

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base of the mountain and boomed back in a loud whisper.

"What should we do?" He asked, though He didn't seem very concerned.

"Let's wait and see what move they make," I said.

Meanwhile, I counted them. With the scout, there were sixteen.

I could swear it got colder and that the wind blew the snow more insistently than ever, but it may have been my imagination. Besides, I was sweating, an anomaly if ever I saw one. We waited.

They made their move. Three of the braver beasts started down the slope opposite, gained confidence, and loped full speed across the small valley which they covered in a dozen strides. When they reached the base of our hill, I shouted, "Shoot!"

We opened fire and stopped them before they were halfway up our hill.

The other wolves snorted and snarled among themselves—much like football players planning strategy.

"Maybe they'll go away now," He said.

"Not a wolf," I said. "For one thing, we've insulted them. A wolf is too proud a creature to give up without a fight. Besides, they look rangy—hungry. They won't stop as long as they think they've found supper."

Just then, four more beasts flashed down the slope and toward us, snarling, foam flecking the corners of their mouths, their eyes scorching the darkness. I brought the last one down only a dozen feet away from me--just in time to hear the vicious growl behind us!

We whirled. Two wolves had detached from the main pack and had slunk around behind us and come up the back of our hill, almost in the footprints we had made. I caught one with a narcodart burst as he leaped. He twisted in midflight, crashed short of me by two feet, choked, tried to get up, and passed out. The second wolf had come too fast and landed on His shoulders, bearing Him to the ground and sinking teeth into the pseudo-flesh. Apparently the cultured meat was as good as regular meat, for the wolf didn't draw back. It swung its head down to tear open the android's neck. Suddenly, the artificial man swung His fist against the side of the beast's head and crushed its skull. He had apparently hardened His flesh into a mallet-like weapon. The wolf gurgled and fell off Him.

"Your face," I said. His cheek had been chewed up badly, and He was bleeding profusely.

"It'll be all right." Even as He spoke, the bleeding stopped. His cheek seemed to crawl with a life of its own. He reached up and tore away the flap of flesh the wolf

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had loosened. I could see, beneath, the welling brightness of smooth, new skin. In moments, there was no sign of His wound. "The other six," He said, indicating the last of the enemy.

But they were slinking off along the ridge, watching us carefully but with no apparent intent of attack. They had seen ten of their kind fall before us, and they had suddenly lost some of their pride —enough, anyway, to let them give up in hopes of finding easier quarry.

"Let's go," I said, "before they change their minds and come back. Or before their buddies wake up."

"Just a minute," He said, kneeling before the wolf He had killed with His hand. In a minute, He skinned it as He had the rabbit and had torn large chunks of its meat from its flanks.

"Wolf meat will be stringy," I said inanely.

"I need it," He said. "I don't much care about the taste. The changes are accelerating, Jacob. I'll only be a minute."

He crammed the bloody meat into His mouth and swallowed it with a minimum of chewing. I guessed He had adapted His digestive system in some way to handle what He was throwing at it. I would have given anything, suddenly, to have been able to x-ray Him, run tests on Him, see just exactly what He had done to himself. It was the doctor in me again. Curious even with wolves ranging nearby. Ten minutes later, He had devoured most of the animal and was ready to go.

Two and a half hours after dawn, we reached the cabin. It was as I remembered it, comfy and well-placed among trees, sheltered by a cliff. I had no key this time. I broke a pane of glass in the door and entered the hard way. Inside, we found a cardboard box and used part of it to cover the broken pane and keep out the worst of the wind. I plugged in the heaters after He started the generator, and I thanked God that Harry had electric heaters. No smoke with electric heaters.

"The food," He said. "I want to see what I have to work with."

"This way," I said, taking Him down into the natural icebox of the cellar. There was very nearly a whole cow hung from meat hooks embedded in the ceiling. The meat was frozen. The walls of the room, natural rock, were coated with thick, brown ice, as was the floor. I led Him back upstairs and showed Him the pantry where Harry kept two hundred cans of fruit, meat, and vegetables.

"Take out all you'll need for three days," He said. "I'll take the rest plus the beef in the cellar. I'll need all that—maybe more."

"More?"

"You might have to go hunting, Jacob. Can you hunt?"

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"I've done a little. Mostly ducks, though. What would I hunt?"

"Wolves. Geese, if it's that time of year. Rabbits. Elk."

I laughed. "Let's see you eat what you have. Then we'll talk about hunting."

I went to the window to check the weather. Snow, drifts, wind. Helicopters couldn't move in that soup, and foot parties could get easily separated and lost. Satisfied that we wouldn't be interrupted by any nasty WA patrols, I went into the bedroom, stripped, fell into bed, and didn't even mind that there were no sheets, just the spread.

I woke after many bad dreams, listened to the wind a while, then dressed and went into the living room. He was not in sight. I called His name and went into the kitchen where I found Him.

He had changed.

"It's all right, Jacob," He said. His voice was deeper now, just a little hard to understand.

"All right?" I said, looking Him over. The floor was littered with nearly two hundred empty cans. He squatted on the floor in the middle of the litter, half again as large as when I had left Him eight hours earlier. There was virtually no distinction between His head and neck, just one solid mass that connected with His shoulders. He had His shirt off, and His chest was ringed with folds of tissue, though it was muscle, not fat. His arms were huge, as big around as gallon jugs at the biceps, and a good eleven inches at the wrists. His legs had swollen and burst His trousers. His feet were buckets.

I had the feeling I was in some small, tasteless carnival sideshow gawking at a freak. COME AND SEE MUSCLEMAN, the signs would read outside the tent. SO BOUND WITH MUSCLES THAT HE CAN BARELY MOVE . . .

He laughed. It was fat, unpleasant. "Jacob, Jacob, Jacob," He crooned. "Have faith. I told you I was changing. But this is only an intermediate step. This form is no good at all. It is what I am heading towards, Jacob. You can understand that?"

"I don't know. What are you heading for?"

"You'll see, Jacob."

"How did you manage to gain all this—tissue in a few hours. And from just a couple of hundred cans of food?"

"My system doesn't waste anything. What I take in as a pound of food, I put out as three quarters of a pound of tissue. I use most of the water. Almost no feces. By the way, you'll have to go hunting."

I sat down at the kitchen table and looked at Him. "At first I thought you were something good, something that could help Man. Now I'm not so sure. You're grotesque!"

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Silence. Then: "I need two more days, Jacob. After that, I *will* benefit your people. I can bring Man unlimited life span, can teach him to heal as I heal, to control the shape of his body, to teleport, to—"

"Teleport?" I stood, sat down quickly. "What do you mean?"

"I've mastered teleportation. My present state won't allow it, but future androids will test the theories. Then men will learn; I'll teach them."

"But no one will build any future androids!" I said.

"I will," He said matter-of-factly. "I will."

I went outside with one of Harry's guns and a pocket full of ammunition on the pretense of hunting an elk. The real reason was I had to get away from Him, to gain time to think. The old Frankenstein tale kept coming back to me so that I could not think clearly. Mary Shelley be damned! She had written a book that still haunted me and that clashed too closely now with reality. I knew He was not a beast that strangled little boys. I was not afraid of a great, stitched graveyard monster creeping about in the night mists. But I was afraid of whatever the android was becoming. It was something more werewolfian than any writer of horror tales had ever envisioned.

And yet He assured me so sincerely that these changes were necessary so that He might help Mankind. I believed Him! Despite the horrid mutation He had become, I still put credence in His words, still trusted Him as I had trusted no man since Harry. Suddenly I laughed out loud—for the android was not even a man! I was placing my trust in an artifically cultured mass of tissues and organs who had been made—thanks to a science apparently better than God's—superior to men. So be it. If I could not trust a being superior to Man, then it must follow that Man, being lesser, was even more untrustworthy. No, I had to stick with Him. I had promised Him that much. If He turned on me and devoured me to feed His great need for flesh, then it would be as if the angels themselves had double-crossed me.

Having irrevocably committed myself to a course of action, I felt greatly relieved. I was still afraid, but the anxiety over whether I was doing right or wrong drained away like the last of a filthy flood and left me purged. I unslung the rifle from my shoulder, loaded it, and seriously set out for elk.

I found more wolves instead.

I don't know whether it was the same pack that He and I had fought off the previous night or whether it was a different bunch. I heard their howls before I saw

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them. I had a heavy gun with me now, plus the narcodart pistol, and I was feeling braver than I really had a right to. I topped a hill that gave me a clear view down the length of a small valley that ran for approximately a mile before a cross run of foothills broke through it. A hundred yards down that valley, a pack of eight or nine wolves were worrying something they had killed. I could tell from the racket they were making that they had eaten their fill and were now merely showing off for the benefit of any other beast in the neighborhood. After a few minutes, they turned as a group and wandered up the valley towards me.

I dropped onto the ground and flattened myself to blend into the scenery. The wind was blowing my way, and I knew they wouldn't scent me. They broke into a lope for a few seconds, stopped and ambled again. When they were no more than a hundred feet from me, I aimed at the center of the lead demon's skull and slowly squeezed the trigger.

The blast slammed about the hilly countryside and boomed back at me like a dozen cannons. The wolf's head shattered, and he was flung backwards six feet where he rolled over in the snow, leaking blood. The rest of the pack turned tails and ran down the valley until the darkness swallowed them. I waited a few minutes until I heard one of the frightened beasts howl at the sky. I knew, if I lay still, they would be coming back. And wolves were easier to carry to the cabin than elk.

Ten minutes went by before the first of the pack sneaked back along the edge of the ravine, trying to conceal itself in the scanty vegetation there. I left it alone. It moved up opposite the body of its former companion and timidly approached the corpse, sniffing it all over. It raised its head and smelled the wind, but my scent was being carried the wrong way. It howled, and shortly its friends came to join it. I raised the rifle and sighted on the largest of the group, then had a better idea. Quietly, I put the rifle down and took out my narcodart pistol. I leveled it at the group, swept them from left to right. All were hit. I swept back again, just to make certain. Some tried to run but got only a few feet when the drug affected them and sent them tumbling into the snow, legs akimbo.

I put the pistol away and walked down to the sleeping beasts. I raised the rifle and shot two of them, let the others go. With cord from my pack, I tied the three dead wolves together and dragged them back to the cabin. The three together outweighed me, and it wasn't an easy job.

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When I got back to the cabin, I stacked the wolves on the porch and went inside. He was nowhere in sight. I checked the bedrooms and kitchen but couldn't find Him. I was about to go outside to check for footprints when I remembered the ice cellar. I opened the door and flipped on the light to go down when His voice came to me from somewhere below, hollow and strange, His voice and yet somehow *not* His voice. "Jacob, stay where you are," He said.

I stopped without starting down the steps. The stairs came into one end of the cellar, and it was impossible to see anything from the top of them. "What's the matter?" I asked.

"I'm not—not pleasant to look at," He said.

The voice was something like a seventy-eight rpm recording being played at forty-five, though it was intelligible and still carried enough of His former tones to let me know it was definitely Him. "I think I can take it," I said, starting down the steps.

"No!" It was such a definite negative that I stopped on the third step, then turned and went up to the top again. I was shaking all over, and scenes from that old horror story wound through my mind despite myself.

"The changes—" I said.

"It became necessary to adapt my circulatory system to my newer form," He said. It was eerie talking to Him and not being able to see Him. My mind conjured up worse appearances, surely, than the one He must truly have possessed at that point. "It couldn't support the tissue I was adding. I made it a triple pump affair with external as well as internal vessels."

I sat down on the top step. "I see," I said, seeing nothing.

"And my eyes were insufficient. I did away with those. Other systems are more efficient. A great number of organs—Jacob, in short, I am not human or android any longer. Not even remotely."

For a time, we honored silence. Finally, I said, 'What good are you like this? Are you mobile?"

"No. Too much tissue."

"If you're not mobile," I said, "they'll get you in a few days. Sooner or later they'll come here, and you'll be a sitting duck for them."

"No," He said confidently. "I can never die, Jacob."

"Invulnerability now? Are you certain it will hold up even to nuclear weapons? They'll use limited atomics, I should think, as much as they hated you—and as much as they will hate you when they see whatever it is you've become."

I think it was laughter that rolled up from the cold cellar. At least, it was as close as He could come to make the sound of mirth

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now that He had forsaken human form. Instead of conveying good humor, however, it left me uneasy and with a nagging desire to keep looking over my shoulder. "I'm not invulnerable, Jacob. I am not the immovable object, but the irresistible force."

"I'm afraid you've lost me," I said.

"Did you bring food?" He asked.

"Three wolves."

"Throw them down. I'll get them when you've gone. The beef is almost finished. I'll need more than the three wolves."

"How much?"

"As much as you can bring me, Jacob."

"I'd better go hunt so that I can sleep later," I said.

"One more day, Jacob," He said. "Things are moving faster than I had expected."

I got up and went out for the wolves. I threw them down the steps one at a time. They all landed with a sickening plop and bled on the floor. I closed the door and stood in the living room, listening. A few seconds passed, then I heard a heavy, rapid breathing sound, a wet slithering, and a short series of deep, guttural sounds of joy. Then silence. I got more shells from the gun cabinet, drank a cup of coffee, and went outside again, looking for something else to kill.

Four rabbits, four wolves, and one female elk later, I stood at the top of the steps, swaying like a drunkard, exhausted, and looked down into the cellar. "I'm tired," I said. "I just can't do any more." I had quartered the elk to make moving it easier and had dragged it to the cabin in four trips, but the exertion had still depleted me until my reserve banks of energy were registering DANGER, REPLENISH IMMEDIATELY, and I could not go on.

"That's all right, Jacob," the voice said, even stronger, more ominous than before. "I've stopped the metamorphosis. I just need enough calories now to maintain my functions and to provide substance for my productions."

I didn't question the word "productions." I was too tired. I mumbled something, staggered off to bed, and slept until late afternoon, a sleep as deep and dreamless as any I had ever had. When I woke, the snow had stopped falling except for thin, hard pellets that cracked now and then against the windows. The only other sound was a strange beating noise. I cocked my head and listened a moment before I was able to identify it: helicopter blades pounding directly overhead . . .

I had been so tired that I had slept in my clothes, and I wasted no time now in getting to the

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window. But there was nothing to see; I was at a bad vantage point. I went into the living room to the row of windows that stretched across the front of the house. I could see it, hanging a hundred feet out from the house, perhaps a hundred and fifty up in the air. It had the giant green letters WA bent to form a globe painted on its side, the symbol of World Authority military. It wasn't a troop transport, however, just a scout craft. It swung out and swept along down the hill, over a rise, was gone. Abruptly, it turned and came back, drifting over the house, turning again, and going away fast. I knew we had been found. The snow had stopped soon after I had come in the last time. It had not covered my last few sets of footprints.

I started toward the cellar, checked myself. There was nothing He could do about the situation. He was immobile. And perhaps I had been misinterpreting the helicopter. Maybe they didn't suspect. But I knew that wasn't so. I got the rifle, loaded it, and checked the level of pins in my narcodart pistol. I pulled a chair up to the window and settled down to wait. I had promised Him time to finish whatever it was He was doing. I would see that He got it.

When the troop transport came an hour and twenty minutes later, my nerves were shot. It settled down two hills below us, disgorging thirty or forty men in white snowsuits, all armed with black, ugly guns. I pushed back the curtains, slid the window open, and knocked the screen out with the rifle butt. I sighted on one of the lead men, wrapped my finger around the trigger, and promptly put the gun down without shooting. After fifteen years as a physician, fifteen years of prolonging and saving lives, I could not fire at a man. It was not the same as a wolf or rabbit, not the same at all.

The troops were crossing the open space quickly, hunched and running, guns held out to their sides. I turned and ran to the cellar door and went down the steps two at a time.

"Jacob!"

It was an excuse to go down, and I knew it. There was danger, yes, but I had confronted Him now chiefly because my curiosity needed salving.

"Jacob, you shouldn't have!"

And, truly, I shouldn't have. I stopped and moved back against the wall, unable to speak. He had changed more than I had guessed. I knew that He was not human, but I was not prepared for this. He filled half the cellar, a great pulsing mass of ugly, veined flesh, reddish-brown in color. He seemed attached to the walls with pseudopods that bored away into the rock, anchoring

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Him. To my left, a tangle of fleshy membranes and tubes formed His vocal apparatus. A deformed, overlarge mouth was set in a fold of flesh. There were no teeth in it and no evidence of the rest of a face anywhere around it.

*Frankenstein!* my mind screamed.

That strange, horrid laughter came again, freezing me even more solidly to the floor. I choked down my terror and concentrated on remembering Him as He had been—and remembering the promises He had made, the promises to help Mankind if only I could gain Him time enough. Well, now was the time when I would discover His true nature and the value of all His promises. "They're coming," I said. "I was going to shoot some of them—but I can't."

"I know," He said. And His voice was one of compassion and friendship. He was silent a moment. The vocal apparatus writhed, enlarged, grew into a many-petaled flower. When He spoke again, it was with His old voice. "I've been meaning to work on that all along," He said apologetically. "Just didn't have the time."

"What will you do?" I asked.

Someone tapped me on the shoulder.

I leaped, my heart pounding. He laughed.

I turned, expecting the WA police with guns, handcuffs, and nasty faces. Instead, I stood looking at an android, an exact copy of Him down to the dimple in its chin. "It's you!" I managed to say.

"Look under the steps," He said from the malformed mouth.

"This way, Jacob," the new android said, taking me by the arm.

I went with it. Behind the steps, standing against the rock wall, were three more androids, all exactly alike.

"How—?"

"I made them," He said.

"But what good will this do? They'll just destroy all of them."

"All of me," He corrected. "Each of these is me, a different facet of me. These are not individuals, Jacob, but other me's. And they will not be destroyed. I can have them teleport themselves out of here if the police come into the cellar."

"But what purpose—"

"To help Mankind, as I told you, Jacob. Forget your Frankensteins. Yes, I knew what you were thinking. Another ability of mine. But I certainly don't hold anything against you. I couldn't even if I should, because I have developed above revenge or vendetta. Jacob, believe me, I only want to help Mankind. I can use my powers to liberate each man's brain so that it is one hundred

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percent operable, as is mine. Every man can become a superman."

"And develop into what you have become?"

"No, no. This is only a stage, Jacob, that a few androids will have to undergo in order to produce more androids—a highly sophisticated form of budding. That's how I created those other me's. Man will always look like Man, but he will have abilities, now, far beyond anything he ever dreamed of."

I believed Him now. There was nothing else to do. "Then we'll explain it to the police and—"

"No, Jacob," He said. "There will be a long, drawn out fight before I am accepted by Mankind. We have to play for more time."

"How, for God's sake?" I thought of the advancing troops.

"You'll take this one with you and let them kill him. They'll think they have finished off the menace of the Android Who Wouldn't Take Orders. That will give me enough time."

I stood, looking at the android who would die, the part of Him that was to be sacrificed. "One thing," I said.

"What is that, Jacob?"

"What *will* we do for room? You'll not only be making Man near to immortal, but you'll be flooding the world with replicas of yourself, with Doppelgangers. Where will we put everyone?"

"With his entire intellect at hand, with all of his brain open to use, Man will move to the stars, Jacob. There are no limits any longer. There is more than enough room, Jacob. I saw to that."

"*You* saw to it?"

"When I formed it, Jacob. When I created the universe."

I choked, almost fell. The new android gripped me and grinned His old grin. I looked back to the blob of tissue pulsing before me. "You mean—?"

"You had no idea how unusual my flesh was, did you, Jacob? It's *the* flesh, Jacob. Sorry to break it to you so suddenly, but—as you know—there is very little time. The soldiers are almost at the front door, by the way. You had better get my other self upstairs and let them kill him. I won't let them do anything to you, Jacob. As soon as things are straightened out here, I'll send one of myselves to you. I'll always be with you."

I turned and started up the steps behind the android. My mind was spinning wildly, unable to settle on any order of thoughts.

"And, Jacob," He said behind me. I turned. "Man will not be nearly immortal. He will be completely immortal. The time has come. There will never be another death."

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We went upstairs, into the living room. He walked to the door and threw it open, stepping onto the porch overlooking all that grand scenery. He walked down the steps, His arms outstretched, and they shot Him. Half a dozen marksmen opened fire. He jerked spasmodically, danced across the white carpet, and crashed onto His face, blood pouring out of His body in twenty different places.

I raised my hands and stepped outside. It was Him they wanted to kill. They would take me prisoner and decide my fate later. Two WA police flanked me, cuffed my hands together, and led me across the frozen earth towards the copter on the far hill.

I looked back once at the bloody corpse. He had said there would be no more death. I realized, suddenly, that this couldn't be called death. Not really. They had merely shot a husk. He lived on in three others and in the blob of flesh in the ice cellar. And there would be thousands of other husks shortly. He was with us at last.

*He.*

And, of course, His name had always been spelled with a capital letter. Man was moving out. Man was immortal. The mystery of His flesh wrapped us like a blanket and carried us into the New World.

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# MY PLANET 'TIS OF THEE–

*by Isaac Asimov*

I LOVE PEOPLE, I REALLY DO; AND YET, in viewing the future, I am forced to be guided by a certain cynicism, because so many people, however lovable, seem immune to reason.

Several years ago, for instance, at some gathering, a Jewish woman argued, with considerable emotion, that she could never feel real confidence in the good-will of Gentiles because they had stood aside and allowed Nazi Germany to torture and kill Jews by the millions without ever really doing anything about it.

I could appreciate her feelings, being Jewish myself, but didn't share them. To make my point, I asked her, quietly, "What are you doing about Negro civil rights?"

And she answered sharply (and rather as I expected), "Let's solve our own problems before we take on those of other people."

But I had not made my point after all, for—would you believe it—there turned out to be no way in which I could convince her of the inconsistency in her position.

But we have to take people as they are, complete with their aversion to the rational, and face, in these last decades of the twentieth century, the most crucial problem mankind has ever had to deal with. It is the question of sheer survival; not for this sect or that, this nation or that, this political or economic doctrine or that—but, quite simply, for civilization generally.

And maybe even for mankind generally.

And maybe even for multicellular life generally.

The prime problem is that of increasing population, something I



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have already considered as forcefully as I know how.* But even if we solve that matter; even if right now, as of this minute, the population of Earth levels off, we still face an overwhelming problem. The population of Earth is *already* too high for survival, for we grow in other ways than mere numbers.

You see, it is an article of faith with us that we must live in a "growing economy," that we must "progress" and "advance," that we must have it ever better. Arguing against all that is like arguing against kindness and mercy and love, but I have to. Growing, and advancing, and having it better, has a price tag. To have a still more affluent society inevitably means the utilization of Earth's resources at a still greater rate and, in particular, the consumption of energy at a still greater rate.

As it is, the utilization of irreplaceable resources and the consumption of energy has been increasing faster than the population for many decades, and I have seen it stated that by the time the United States has doubled its population, say by 2020, it will have increased its energy consumption seven-fold.

I strongly suspect that the rate of pollution of the environment is roughly proportional to the rate of energy consumption, and that, barring strenuous action to prevent it, a seven-fold increase in the latter means a seven-fold increase in the former. And in only fifty years.

Look at it another way.

As it happens, the United States is currently consuming somewhat over half the irreplaceable resources produced on Earth—the metals, fossil fuels and so on—despite the fact that it only has $\frac{1}{16}$ the population of the Earth.

The rest of the world would, of course, like to attain our level of affluence, and it is hard to argue that they have no right to try to do so. But suppose they succeed and all Earth lives on the American living standard. The remaining $\frac{15}{16}$ of the Earth's population would then be using 15 times as much of Earth's resources as our $\frac{1}{16}$ does and will produce 15 times as much pollution.

The rate of coal and oil production then, of metal and mineral production, of paper, plastics, of automobiles and everything else would have to be something like eight times what it is now to keep all of Earth at American-like affluence, even if the population increases no higher than it is right now. And eight times as much pollution.

Can we afford this?

And if population continues to increase at its present rate and world

* *See THE POWER OF PROGRESSION, F & SF, May 1969.*

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affluence is *still* expected then in fifty years, with a seven-fold increase in energy consumption expected, the rate of rifling of Earth's resources must be over *fifty* times what it now is.

It can't be done. The resources don't exist for the rifling. The capacity for the absorption of a fifty-fold increase in pollution just isn't there.

The fact of the matter is that we can no longer proceed along the lines that have served us in the past. We can't imagine that we can continue to increase our rate of production just as fast as we can manage, that unlimited growth is possible (let alone desirable) and that good old Earth will give us all we need, however much that is, and take all the dregs we hand back, however much that is.

We are *not* in an infinite world any longer; we are (and have been for some time now) in a terribly *finite* world; and we must either adjust to that or die.

We can measure the finiteness of a world by its interdependence, and we can trace the growth of interdependence by a rough estimate of the value of distance at various times in history. Thus, as long as the Earth was essentially infinite, it was possible for particular portions to be far enough apart to ignore each other; and the greater the distance required for such ignoring the closer the approach of finiteness.

Just to take a few examples—

In 1650 B.C., it did not concern the Greeks that the Egyptian Middle Kingdom (500 miles away) had fallen to the Hyksos invaders. In 525 B.C., however, the fall of Egypt to Persia clearly heightened the dangers besetting Greece.

In 215 B.C., the deadly duel between Rome and Carthage raised no echo in the hearts of Britons on their tight little isle, 1,000 miles away. By 400 A.D., however, the state of Italy with respect to Germanic invaders was of intense interest to Britain, for Alaric's presence in northern Italy cost Britain its Roman army and its civilization.

By 1935 A.D., most Americans could still live as though it didn't matter what happened in Europe, 3,000 miles away, but after another generation, they would be told, and believe, that what happened in Seoul, 10,000 miles away, was of such vital importance to Keokuk that tens of thousands of Americans must die.

If one wanted to take the trouble, one could extend this thing backward in time and fill in the chinks and work out a graph representing the change in minimum distance of separation required for isolation, with time. The line would not be straight, but I think we can all see that it would rise more or less steadily: quite slowly at first, quite rapidly later on.

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And now we've run out of distance. The maximum distance of separation of Earth's surface is 12,500 miles, and that is not far enough any longer to be safe. Oh, people might want to be isolated and might stubbornly insist they don't care what happens 12,500 miles away or even 500 miles away, but when they say that, they are simply closing their eyes at noon and insisting that the Sun has set.

The interdependence is not just political and military, of course, but economic, social, cultural, and everything else. Nothing of significance (and hardly anything any longer is of insignificance) that happens anywhere can fail to affect everywhere. Because four rock-singers in Liverpool decided a few years ago that it was a drag to go to the barber, I now wear sideburns.

But never mind the trivia. Let's go right to the top and make one thing clear. It is no longer possible to solve the real problems of our planet by working on the assumption that the world is infinite. Whatever the problem is; whether it is overpopulation, dwindling resources, multiplying pollution, or intensifying social unrest; no minor part of the planet can solve it without regard for, or attention to, the rest of Earth.

Since no single nation controls an effective majority of Earth's population, area, resources or power, each nation comes under the heading of "minor part of the planet." It follows, in my opinion, that no nation can solve its own major problems alone.

Paraguay cannot solve its major problems in isolation, and neither can the United States, and for the same reason. Both Paraguay and the United States deal with too small a part of the problem, and anything either does can and will be negated if the rest of the planet does not choose to go along.

Suppose the United States did decide to enforce a policy of strict population control and established a firm population plateau at 200 million. Can this possibly solve our problems under any conditions, if the rest of the world continued to breed itself upward like rabbits?

One might, for the sake of argument, maintain that with a stable population and our superb technology, we could easily defend ourselves against the rest of the world, especially if the rest of the world sinks into starvation and disaster through overcrowding.

But some of them out there have nuclear weapons that can do us tremendous damage while we're wiping them out, and all of them have resources that we have to collect. We can harden our hearts to the famines they will undergo, but can we harden our immunity to the plagues that will sweep through them on the way to us?

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And what if the rest of the world manages to achieve population stability also and continues to drive hard for greater economic affluence, each nation in a mad scramble for it without regard to the others? Can we tell them that half the resources they control belong to us and that they'd better not use those resources recklessly because we don't intend to give up our affluence for their sake? And how do we make them hold still for that? Our record in Vietnam doesn't fill me with confidence.

And if they improve their lot somehow without disimproving ours and begin to pollute at the rate one would expect of affluence, what then?

If we in the United States cleaned up our rivers and unclogged our lakes and de-stinked our atmosphere, what super-Canute is going to say to the air and water of the Earth generally: Cross not our borders for you are unclean?

In short, our problems are now planetary, and our solutions will have to be planetary too.

What this means is that the various nations have to come to some sort of agreement in order to find and implement planetary solutions.

As a barest minimum, the United States and the Soviet Union will have to work together. Not only is war between them unthinkable, but disagreement short of war, out of national stubbornness and suspicion, that will prevent common action on these problems, will only mean a somewhat slower and perhaps, in the long run, more agonizing death than war could bring.

Pride and patriotism aren't going to work on a national basis. It is utterly irrelevant that we think the Russians are a bunch of Commies or that they think we are a bunch of Imperialists. Whether they're right, or we're right, or both of us are right, or neither, makes no difference. We would still have to work together, agree on a common policy, and stay agreed on it, or all go under.

Even the United States and the Soviet Union together might not swing it. It might require the wholehearted cooperation of western Europe, China (Communist China, not Taiwan) and India as well, to set up the minimum requirements for planetary solutions. The rest of the world could then follow voluntarily or reluctantly or even under the lash—but follow.

Don't get me wrong. I don't enjoy the thought of the powerful nations of the world getting together to force the rest of the planet into line. I would love to see a democratic world government with a strong, freely elected executive with limited tenure, a representative legislature,

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respected world courts, and a firm agreement on the part of all peoples to abide by majority decisions. The only trouble is I don't think we have the faintest chance of swinging it in thirty years, and thirty years is all the time we have in my opinion.

In the short run, therefore, we must settle for something less.

The trouble is that our society, our culture, our every way of thinking is built around the assumption of an infinite world. It is the very essence of my lady friend of the introduction and her: "Let's solve our own problems before we take on those of other people" that she doesn't see that there are no longer such things as my problems and your problems—but only problems.

It is not inconceivable, therefore, that under the dark glimmering of outmoded ways of thought, we will all sink to death rather than cooperate, for we will feel that *those* bad-guys may use that cooperation to take advantage of *us* good-guys. (And those guys would be saying exactly the same thing with the pronouns reversing referents.)

With this possibility horribly close to us and with an ideal world government almost certainly far in the future, I will be ecstatically happy to see cooperation on any terms. Let every nation desperately pretend it is retaining its sovereignty; let it bellow its resentment and hatred for the others; as long as each nation cooperates (even sneakily and sullenly) in measures that are even half-good and manage to keep us drifting along with our nostrils above water until such time as a real world government can be developed.

There is a historical analogy I would like to offer. It is imperfect and inadequate, as all historical analogies are, but here it is anyway.

In 1776, the rebelling British colonies on the North American east-central coast declared themselves "free and independent states" and were recognized as such by Great Britain in 1783.

Through long habit we think of states as parts of a nation, marked off for administrative purposes and possessing no true independence, but if so we are deluding ourselves. The word "state" refers to a self-contained political entity, entirely self-governing. The thirteen states, free and independent, were filled with the mutual suspicions you would expect of any neighboring governments. For several years after 1783, the United States were states that were united only in their title. They fought with each other propagandistically, economically and, very nearly, militarily.

The tighter union under the Constitution (prepared in 1787, adopted in 1789—with Rhode Island holding out till 1791) was by no

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means an enthusiastically accepted situation. It was forced upon the mutually hostile states, to their reluctance and chagrin, by the existence of Continental problems that required Continental solutions, failing which, European overlordship would surely have been reimposed.

Nor was the Constitution more than jerry-built at first. It was the states that were "sovereign," their acceptance of Union was thought to be voluntary and at different times various states (suffering under a feeling of being abused) played with the notion of withdrawing that acceptance and leaving the Union.

Finally, in 1860 and 1861, such withdrawal was actually attempted by eleven states of the southeast, and it took four years of bloody warfare to point out the fallacy in their reasoning.

The situation of 1787 is being repeated now on a planetary scale in area and population, and considering the size of the first and the heterogeneity of the second, we might consider a happy ending this time as beyond hope, but I wonder—

In some ways difficulty has lessened. Advances in transportation and communication have made the entire planet a far smaller place in every way than the eastern seaboard of the United States was in 1787. And the heterogeneity of the world's population is less than one might think. Tokyo and Cairo look more like Chicago in 1970, than Charleston looked like Boston in 1787. Of course, there are differences and great ones, but the ruling classes in all nations live more and more as part of the same (largely Americanized) culture.

So planetary union by paste and piano-wire, while the pretense of national sovereignty is maintained, can come. But will it last?

How long did the American Constitution serve to hold the American states together?—Seventy years.

Then came the bitterest and most stubbornly contested civil war in Western history, and it would not have taken much for it to end the other way, with the Union destroyed.

Fortunately for us, the world had not yet become finite in the 19th Century. The United States could fight a civil war and survive.

But over a century has passed since then, and we can no longer take such risks. Suppose a working planetary government is set up, conceived in expediency and dedicated to the proposition that mankind must somehow survive.

If, then, 70 years later, there is a planetary civil war, do you suppose we will have to see which side wins in order to find out whether any planetary government so conceived and so dedicated can long endure? Of course not; the mere fact that there is civil war at all would settle

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the matter. The government, civilization, mankind, would not endure.

So in the decades that follow the beginnings of foot-dragging cooperation, we must go on to establish greater sympathy among peoples and steadily diminish idiotic national prejudices—and do so without a single false step. That is the price of finitude.

It won't be easy, but it's got to be done.

Well, how?

Shall we try another imperfect historical analogy?

It is my feeling that what did most to break down the sharp feeling of statism within the United States was the westward migration. The opening of the western frontier was the common task of the settled states of the east. The west was not parcelled out, area by area, for this state and that, so that each of the older states might increase its pride in its special-ness and work up further ground for hatred against the rest. All the west was open to all Americans.

Men from the various states mixed freely, and no significant portion of the task of "the winning of the west" could be attributed to anything smaller than the United States in general.

Sure, regional pride continued and will always continue, but it was defused to the point where members of one state did not feel they had a God-given right to kill members of another state.

And what is the equivalent of the westward migration on a planetary scale?

How about the space effort?

It is getting hard to say this. The entire program has been so nationalized by the traumatic effect of the Soviet Union having been the first nation to place a satellite in orbit that it has become the darling of the conservatives. It has been militarized, it has been draped with the flag, it has been permeated by an aura of *Reader's Digest* and Billy Graham.

So it has become an object of suspicion to the liberals.

To many of the latter it now seems like an opiate, designed to keep the eyes of the American people fixed on the Moon while on Earth the cities decay and people starve. Over and over again they tell us the choice is Moon or Earth, space or cities, rockets or people.

If that were really the choice, I would choose Earth, cities and people myself, but it isn't. The real problem is that almost every nation on Earth spends most of its money and effort on preparing for war (or actually fighting one). The choice is not Moon or Earth at all. The choice is war or Earth, soldiers or cities, missiles or people, and every nation chooses war, soldiers, and missiles.

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Achieve a world government of any kind, however rickety, and let military expenditures die down and there will at once be enough muscle and brain extant to make possible both space and cities, both Earth and Moon, both people and rockets.

But why bother? What's the good of a man on the Moon?

I have argued in other places about the material good that might come of it; of knowledge to be gained that will increase our understanding of Earth's geology, of the Solar system's origin, even of the workings of life. I have spoken of the new technology that might become possible based on the abundance of vacuum, hard radiation, and low temperature on the Moon.

I have even argued in favor of the establishment of an ecologically independent colony on the Moon; one that (after its initial start with Earth capital) can continue on its own through the careful utilization of resources available from the Moon's crust—pointing out that such a Moon-colony can offer Earth an abstract service far beyond any concrete advantage it might bring.

The reason for that is that the Moon is so obviously a finite world. Its lack of surface air and water means that any colonists on the Moon must cycle their resources with infinite care, for they will be living in a society that will leave almost no margin for error.

Assuming that the colony survives and functions, then it will serve us both as an inspiration and as an example. It will show us how human beings can live with finiteness, and it may even help teach us how.

But forget all that. Let's suppose that a real Moon-colony turns out to be impossible; that the material benefits of space turn out to be an illusion; that the knowledge gained by scientists is of use to theoreticians only and remains worthless to the common man. Let us suppose that the space effort, both now and in the future, is simply a vastly expensive boondoggle, a mere climbing of super-Everests.

It would even so, *still* be infinitely worthwhile.

As it stands, the space effort has grown too expensive for any single nation—even for the United States or the Soviet Union—that insists on spending most of its effort on the sterility of armaments and war.

Once the more powerful nations, at least, are forced by dreadful circumstance into cooperation and the makeshift planetary government starts, the space effort will, almost inevitably, in my opinion, become a multi-national effort.

And there lies my greatest hope for the survival of mankind.

Why should not all nations find a common ground in the assault on space? The only enemy there is the dark of the unknown, and surely

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that is an enemy all mankind can fight with equal enthusaism. The exploration of space can call upon us all alike to defeat ignorance, to open new horizons, and it will present mankind with a kind of accomplishment so large as by its very size to shrivel nations to insignificance and leave room in the mind for nothing smaller than planetary man.

Even now there is a glimpse of the supra-national attraction of space-accomplishment. The successful placing of a man on the Moon was, admittedly, a strictly American achievement, full of American flags stuck into Lunar soil, and American presidents hastening to the Pacific Ocean with their benediction, and American vice-presidents handing out bits of Moon-rock to everyone in Asia—and *still* the accomplishment touched everyone, even the Russians. For it was Homo sapiens that were making footprints on the Moon, and it was for all of us without exception that those footprints stood for.

Let us have the space effort become multi-national in the future, let there be a planetary flag thrust into the soil of Mars, let men of all parts of the world work on the vast project for the conquest and taming of the Solar system, and surely the consciousness of our union-as-a-species will have a chance to grow.

Again, regional rivalries will remain, always, but overriding them (just possibly) may be the sense of common accomplishment that will slowly but surely break down the disunion of men and leave them with just enough resigned endurance of one another (in the absence of love, resigned endurance will be enough) to turn a makeshift world government into a real one.

(It may not happen, to be sure, for the exploration of the New World in the 16th Century did not bring the European nations together but exacerbated their rivalry—but then they never made it a multinational project.)

If it does happen, however, the space effort, whatever its cost, short of planetary bankruptcy, will have been worthwhile even if it brings us nothing else.

Also, if that happens, the 21st century will see Mankind making the painful transition from the childhood of a pseudo-infinite world of subplanetary societies, through the adolescence of a cooperative national society and into the adulthood of a planetary government ruling over a finite world.

The chances for this are, I repeat, not large, for time is short and folly long; the need is great and vision small; the pressing problems enormously complex and the ruling minds dishearteningly mediocre.

—But I must hope. ◀

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*Here is an entertaining inquiry into how the scientific mind works in matters of love. Dr. Wilson, who has heretofore contributed to F&SF and other publications under the name "Robin Scott"—a* nom de plume *required by his one time employment in a cloak-and-dagger outfit—has decided that he has now been in from the cold long enough to use his real name. Bibliographers please note.*

# THE STATE OF THE ART

***by Robin Scott Wilson***

IN THE KINGDOM OF LOVE, Barney Chekaris was an errant knight who, having slain all the dragons of educational, athletic, and professional challenge, had somehow won no maiden he deemed worth the winning. It was not that the cost of wooing was too high; solid-state physicists at Bell Labs are handsomely paid. It was not that he was ill-favored; he managed to bat well over .300 in the weekend-night baseball games, at East Hampton house parties, and in the singles bars of upper Manhattan. Nor was it some grotesquerie of character or manner or sexual proclivity; once you got to know him, which you could do if you were male, a physicist, a scuba diver, or a mountaineer, his apparent diffidence disappeared and he revealed himself for the warm and interesting man he was.

But he could not so reveal himself to ladies toward whom he felt serious intentions. Such revelations require an ingenuousness which is the product of either a confidence earned in love's tourney or a simplicity of character bordering on idiocy,—and Barney had neither. Oh, he made a good enough first impression. He smiled and was courtly, carried a cigarette lighter even though he did not smoke, had a sure ear for the current argot, dressed with a quiet J. Press kind of elegance, wore his hair at just the correct length for

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the season, and came on with the worldly boyishness of the men in television cigarette commercials who, we are told, think for themselves.

But, oh, the secondary and tertiary impressions! The squirming lure of revealed personality that brightly tempts through the aqueous depths of manners, diversions, superficialities! Whatever it is, this catalyst of love, Barney did not have it. What he was able to reveal of himself to those women who interested him was slight and was presented methodically, with swiftness and economy, like the specifications and performance data for the low-Q, high-resonance laser pumping system he had designed for Bell. The rest lay too deeply buried beneath the dry crust of technique. There was, for Barney, a technique and a method for everything in his vision that struck him as important, for scaling a rock chimney, for diving in cold water, for establishing research parameters, for wooing. And although he often had occasion in his endeavors to employ the phrase, "the state of the art," he hadn't the foggiest notion of the meaning of its final word.

And as his twenties handed the hopeful torch of youth to the slower thirties—that decade in a man's life when the race to the eternal flame seems increasingly less attractive—Barney's frustration with his loveless state grew with the pain and inevitability of an inguinal hernia, until all the pleasures of professional and recreational dragon-slaying—the breakthrough in boundary-layer analysis, the record dive off Mallorca, the conquest of the impossible north face of Khalimani—clanked like Japanese louis d'pot metal in the secret coffers of his ego. "What is it," he asked himself with metronomic regularity, "that other guys got that I haven't got?" And that, of course, is a question the asking of which precludes any answer. So it was that Barney's search for a maiden worth the winning narrowed with each failure. His secret fantasies became elaborate scenerios, beyond the powers of life to cast. His notion of the nature of love became both precise and unrealistic, Daliesque in its sharp delineation of the chimerical.

Then one day after a particularly startling success in his research, one of those sudden insights that are *not* the result of blind serendipity, one that would have pleased any scientist not emptied—as was Barney—of pride, a revolutionary thought occurred to him. Surely, he reasoned, human emotions—under which rubric love must be accounted—surely, love could differ in complexity from P-N boundary-layer emissions only in degree, not in kind. Surely, it was just as susceptible to rational analysis and tech-

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nical manipulation. Surely, sound research could solve his problem just as it could solve—given the fullness of time, the beneficence of nature, and adequate funding from the front office—all problems. It was worth a try.

He took six months' leave of absence from Mother Bell and began to read up on the literature, earrelled in the New York Public Library behind dour lions. He read Ovid and Dr. Frank Crane and Havelock Ellis and Shakespeare and Don Juan and Krafft-Ebing and a Little Blue Book called *How to Attract and Hold Persons of the Opposite Sex* and dozens of volumes on Affective Psychology and Perceptual Psychology and Abnormal Psychology and Psychochemistry and *Coming of Age in Samoa* and Herbert Marcuse and Emily Post and Ashley Montague and the *Playboy Advisor*. He transformed his appearance again and again. He furnished his apartment with the best taste money could buy. He memorized vast passages of witty dialogue. And every weekend he went to a house party or a singles bar in the east eighties, spotted a handsome girl who seemed to approximate his narrow ideal, made an approach on the basis of that week's research, and got his face slapped, or indeed got a girl into bed for a night or two, or went home bored and alone. What he did not get, what he did not find, was love.

After ten weeks of this, he wrote himself a negative report and changed the direction of his research. He began to explore curious old volumes concerned with the chemical basis of love—perfumes, aphrodisiacs, odd potions and philters. He found them uniformly unscientific, primarily designed as aids to seduction, which was not his problem. But he tried them, those that did not strike him as too Faustian. He found it true that a girl stuffed with crab meat, venison, and eggs dosed with paprika, all washed down with brandy and grenadine, *was* a bit more forthcoming, but still—no love.

At this point, two matters added new urgency to Barney's research: his six months were nearing an end, and his heightened social activity had brought within his ken a girl who, on the basis of a slight and studiously casual acquaintance, seemed perfectly to fulfill his ideal. He fell so desperately in love with her—although much of her remained for him hypothetical—that he feared to throttle back, pop his flaps, and commit himself to a final approach without having first perfected—hell, *discovered*—a foolproof technique, one amply field-tested on girls of lesser quality. He concentrated fiercely, driven by time and desire, and it occurred to him that if the chemical approach appeared to produce only physi-

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ological responses, pleasant though they were, perhaps some means should be sought for affecting the higher mind, surely the seat of the ideal love he hoped to find. He took to reading love poems to girls, to composing love poems *for* girls. He became a skilled reader of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Emily Brontë and Omar Khayyám and *The Song of Solomon;* he became adept at the sonnet (Petrarchan and Spenserian). But night after night, his poetry produced only glazed eyes on his test models, and after a brief flash of interest in the novelty of it all, they invariably subsided into lifelessness, yawning and stretching without feline languor on the tiger-skin covering of the plump couch opposite the four woofers, six midrangers, and ten tweeters of Barney's elaborate hi-fi, an impressive monster of oiled walnut and brushed brass which his decorator had told him was an integral part of any successful bachelor's domicile.

Barney filed another negative report: fashionable finery, good looks, money, success, an apartment furnished with someone else's impeccable taste, exotic entertainment, drugs, contrived conversation—and now poetry—all had failed to bring Barney the love he sought. And then one evening a week before the end of his six months and the return to the monomania of science, as he sat in his chair by the hi-fi immersed in despondency, Barney conceived a very bathtub of an idea, one which instantly displaced his sodden gloom with golden hope. Perhaps, he reasoned, the seat of love is in the mid-brain, the limbic system, some point between the intellective, neo-mammalian brain of "How do I love thee? Let me count the ways," and the visceral, reptilian brain of booze, shellfish, and cantharides; some point reached, perhaps, by an apt combination of physical and intellectual stimuli. But what stimuli? In what combination? The woofers whumped, the tweeters twanged, magnetized bits of ferrite poured forth their memorized increments of José Feliciano. "Wow!" said Barney softly, careful not to wake the latest in a series of comatose girls. "Variations in air pressure acting directly on the nervous system through the tympanic canal! Primitive! Physical! And then the sophisticated mathematical progressions! Neo-mammalian intellectual! *Music!*"

But not your ordinary, garden-variety music, a thing of melody and interpretation and performance. No, thought Barney, he would need a music free of such dross, a pure combination of scientifically ascertainable ingredients, refined, codified, infinitely reproducible upon demand.

The next morning, as soon as his sleepy guinea pig had left, he

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went to work on the collection of music that had come with the hi-fi. He listened to love songs for hours, and it was quickly apparent that the lyrics played no considerable role in whatever process the songs effected; most defied understanding. Then from Dionne Warwick and the Beatles and Sinatra and African tribal chants and Bach and Montevani and Lawrence Welk and Arlo Guthrie and an ancient crock of a 78 by Kay Kayser, he drew themes and rhythms, and working feverishly at what he knew was his final attempt, he isolated certain pure frequencies and exotic sequences of harmonics and reproduced them slowly, clumsily, on a borrowed Moog. By Wednesday, he had translated all to mathematical notation, which he keyed into the Bell Labs' 1601 for permutations and combinations, and by Thursday he had it all back into audio again, but boosted into frequency ranges just north of the audible. On Friday, he rewired a fine audio oscillator, patched it into his hi-fi, and telephoned the girl of his dreams, his last, grand, go-for-broke experiment.

Sally Benton was tall and very beautiful, with long auburn hair and green eyes and even white teeth that showed when she laughed, which was often. And because she had once met Barney in East Hampton, had heard a number of confusing stories from other girls about Barney's versatile love-making, and had nothing much better to do, she agreed to dine with him that evening. At twenty three, she was young enough to be motivated by curiosity, and old enough not to expect much more than a bit of slap-and-tickle.

Barney launched the experiment without much confidence; too many earlier efforts had gone badly. And so, although he hoped for success, he was realistic enough to copper his bets, to salvage at the minimum the sense of careful, scientific experimentation that was so important to him, to pay his obeisance to the gods of the scientific method. Accordingly, anxious to preserve the purity of the test, he dressed indifferently, abandoning the sometimes uncomfortable *haute mode* the men's magazines had dictated, foregoing the expensive lotions, powders, and hair preparations whose labels promised so much but which had made him feel a bit effeminate. Further, instead of the expensive cuisine in impressive surroundings, the food he offered Sally was simple, unspiced, positively anaphrodisiac, the sort of fare one finds in the better truck stops and in Irish bars in Indianapolis, Indiana. So down did he play the evening's opening hands—no talk of "How do I love thee?" no ad hoc sonnets, no careful conversational

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contrivances from the Little Blue Book—that Sally found herself wondering in the taxi to Barney's apartment why she was sticking around for the second rubber.

Now more than a little resigned to failure, faithful to method, intent as much on the experiment as on the girl, Barney let them into his apartment—stripped of its impressive fineries for the occasion—let Sally divest herself of her wrap, and pointed to a chair back as he headed for the kitchen and the tape deck there. "Toss your coat anywhere, Sally, and sit down. I'll be right back." Sally did as she was asked, but just barely. She was still fascinated at how much the real Barney, whom she supposed she was seeing, varied from the Barney of reputation. But not all *that* fascinated. She perched on the edge of the sofa, flayed of its tiger skin, ready to leap up and be on her way should Barney's manners decay that least increment more.

In the kitchen, Barney started the tape sequence and garnered a half bottle of brandy and two glasses. He had weighed the effects of the brandy on the experiment carefully. It would degrade to some extent the purity of the test, but it would help him to overcome one last problem: the hi-fi output, of course, would be almost inaudible, but not quite. Its effect, if any, would be subliminal. Therefore he would have to mask the slight hiss from the speakers with other sounds lest it prove distracting. But not music, which might itself interfere, might produce unwanted atonalities and beats. Hence the brandy, to loosen his tongue. He would need a great deal of masking conversation.

And thus it was that he sat in a chair across the coffee table from Sally, poured them each a brandy—hers small, his large—and prepared to talk, to ask questions, to speak whatever came unbidden to his mind. For this occasion, for the first time in his long quest, conversation would serve only to conceal the real business of the evening.

Now the purposes of communication are often ill-served by the tongue; one suspects that Demosthenes was a far more impressive figure with the pebbles in, not out of, his mouth. And conversely, random speech, speech intended to do nothing but make a kind of intelligible noise, can communicate a great deal to a perceptive auditor. Like Minneapolis Multiphasic tests and those odd portrayals of pudenda in ink-blots. This is, of course, why lovers whisper sweet nothings to one another.

"Well—uh—skoal!" said Barney, lifting his glass, feeling inadequate to the role assigned him in the experiment.

Sally sipped, a bemused expression on her face. "You're not at all like I thought you'd be. I

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mean, they told me. . . ." She broke off in confusion. There were no polite words for what she had been told about Barney.

"Well, I don't know myself just what I am," said Barney with a rare candor born of desperation and his preoccupation with the experiment. "I'm—uh—just relaxing tonight." Then, with clumsy suddenness: "Hey, Sally. Tell me all about yourself. I mean, like where did you grow up and all."

It was clumsy, but the pitch was familiar and Sally felt herself once more in accustomed territory. She supposed Barney would now fix her with his undivided attention, the piercing eye, the expression of eager interest they all learn somewhere, which is designed to let a girl know that she is the object of all desire, the most fascinating object in the world. She was disappointed. It had been a pleasantly novel evening, with some mystery, and she hated to see it settle into routine phoniness. Perversely, a glint of humor in her eye, Sally returned a backhand: "No, you tell me about *you*."

Barney lapsed into confused silence. He didn't know how to respond and the brandy had not yet helped. But the hi-fi was hissing suspiciously, and desperate to preserve the experiment, he lubricated himself with more Couvoisier and talked. He chattered about his work and about his mountaineering and about his scuba diving and about the Navy and MIT and growing up in Passaic, New Jersey.

Sally, having gotten more consecutive words about himself out of Barney than any woman in history, having turned his obvious ploy, now saw Barney as something more than an object of curiosity and served herself a piece of the conversational pie. She told him about the fashion business and growing up in Columbus, Ohio, and being Spring Carnival Queen at Ohio Wesleyan, and she noted with some satisfaction that as she talked Barney lost his air of preoccupation, of listening to some distant drum, and did indeed begin to fix her with a piercing eye as if she were the most fascinating—not object, but person—in the whole world. And their two accounts of themselves began to cross and merge and weave into *conversation*—which is quite properly defined as a turning about together—and they talked about films and food and politics and the types of people they liked and didn't like, and their expressions of opinion and taste took on that slightly hesitant quality, a certain degree of vagueness, that would permit either of them to back down on a pronouncement or modify it as they learned to read each other's reactions and sought for the congruency they both suddenly very much wanted. They even agreed that just maybe they

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had both been in Ocean City, Maryland, during the same week of August, 1968, although each privately believed it was unlikely.

After a bit, Barney went into the kitchen to insert a continuation of the tape and to get a full bottle of brandy. When he returned, Sally had kicked off her shoes and curled up on the couch—in a little-girl way long-legged women seldom employ—as if she meant to stay there a while, and she looked up at Barney over the rim of her snifter and said, "Barney, you're the most un-phony man I've met in New York and I think maybe I'm falling for you." And Barney knelt beside her on the floor and snatched a quick, covert glance at his watch to see how long it had taken (for science) and how much time he had before the tape would have to be changed (for himself), and then he put his arms around Sally and made love to her until his time was up. Before he stopped thinking about it, he had this big explosive feeling that it was indeed the best of all possible worlds: the girl and the experiment and love were his.

Shortly after two, Barney inserted the third tape and rejoined a disheveled and purring Sally on the couch, and they talked as if no two people had ever been so in love, and they traded love's confidences all through the third and fourth tapes, and as rosy-fingered dawn goosed sleepy birds into morning chatter, they lay side by side in silence, marveling at the expanse of their shared tastes, the congruency of their virtues and faults and desires. And each tried to summon to his mind some last, guard-destroying revelation that would establish their mutual vulnerability and dependency, that would furnish willing hostages whose presence would pre-empt conflict. But since they were in their way innocent people, they had little of the dramatic left to reveal. Still, for Barney, there was the realization that the very success of the experiment bore the seeds of its failure, that since Sally was most palpably in love with him and he with her, he had no choice but to confess the whole dismal truth of his artificial manipulation of her emotions. The Kingdom of Love could expect no less of its vassals. And in any case, he could not play the tapes forever. He would have to take the inevitable gamble that the process begun by the tapes would continue of its own momentum, and if it did not, should the end of the tapes mean the end of love, then he would have to take such solace as he could from the success of the experiment. It would not be much, but it would be a little better than nothing.

Straightening his shoulders, firm of resolution, his heart trembling within him, he started

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to tell Sally all. He told her of his dong research, the methods he had tried, their effects on a legion of experimental subjects.

Sally pressed two fingers to his lips. "Oh, Barney, it doesn't matter. I don't care anything about the girls before me. You're a sweet, sweet man. Knowing the worst about you is still better than the best about most guys."

"But, Sally, that isn't all. You see I got this idea about the interplay between the reptilian, paleomammalian, and neo-mammalian brains, and . . ."

Two fingers again. "Hush, darling. You know I don't understand science, and it doesn't matter. You're sweet and you're sound of wind and limb, and, yes, I will marry you even if you haven't gotten around to asking me yet."

But Barney persisted, his knighthood in flower. "No, you see, this thing about brains . . ."

Sally rose and reached for her skirt. "What we need is some coffee." She wriggled into the skirt and walked, bare-breasted, amazonian, and magnificent, through the swinging doors into the kitchen. "If you'll just show me where it is. And maybe some eggs and bacon."

Barney bounded after her, wrapping a towel around his waist. She would see the tape player and wonder.

She was standing in front of the machine, a puzzled look on her face. It had come to the end of the tape and shut itself off. "Oh, Barney . . ." There was a little sadness in her voice. ". . . I know I can't share everything with you. Your work and all. But I so much want to share everything else in your life. Is music so very important to you?"

"Music? Important? No. Hell. I've never paid much attention to it. I mean, I can dance and I can *talk* some about music, but . . ."

"Oh. I mean, a tape player in the *kitchen*. I thought, you know, it was something really *important* to you. In the *kitchen*."

"No. Just part of an experiment. Like I was telling you. The mid-brain and all . . ."

Sally threw her arms around his neck, her face alight with renewed happiness. "Oh! I'm so glad, darling. If it had been important to you . . . You see, I'm stone tone-deaf. Can't carry a tune in a bucket, and if it had been important to you, I mean music, well I just don't know . . ."

Barney held her tightly in his arms, all thoughts of confession gone. Towel slipping, exultant at love, mourning the experiment, Barney wondered at the bittersweet mixture of pain and pleasure he felt.

"No, baby," he said. "Music doesn't mean a thing to me. I could care less about music." ◄

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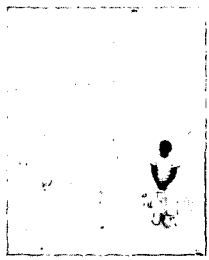
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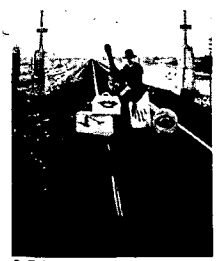
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